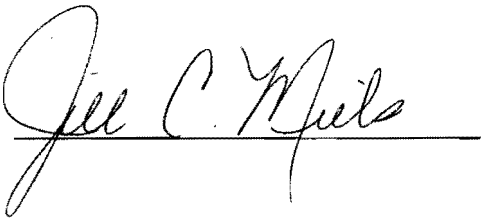
What *Do* Kids Need to Succeed? : Research and Implications for Teachers

An Honors Thesis

by

Stephanie Barbish

Thesis Advisor
Dr. Jill Miels



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Abstract

Recently, schools have perceived a decline in student behavior, and parents and community members have become increasingly concerned with society's impact on youth. Students have a wide range of influences today, and it is difficult for many people, including myself, to make sense of how each influence can help or hinder student success, as well as how we can best give students the tools for success. This lack of information has led to a large gap between belief and action. I first became interested in the Search Institute's research on the "40 Developmental Assets" in EDEL 100, a freshman elementary education class. Developmental assets are defined as critical factors identified for young people's growth and development. In this thesis, I will make the case for a need for more clarity in how adults should view youth's development and their role in it, namely, a national youth policy. I will examine research, primarily from the Search Institute, as well as supporting research in order to conclude what students need to succeed. I will then use research done by the Search Institute and others to formulate implications that this research has for teachers. My hope is that this thesis will benefit educators, parents, and anyone else who cares about helping children by familiarizing them with the asset framework, empowering them to make a difference through education about research results and simple strategies, and encouraging them that they are not alone in the effort to give kids what they need to succeed.

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In Need of a Revolution

"It is not news that the youth of America face challenges to their health and positive youth development that are unique to this century" (Scales & Leffert, 1999, ix). The "infrastructure" for positive child and youth development is being threatened by changes in the structure of the family, the community, workplace, society, and international affairs (Leffert, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 1997). This change, along with perceived changes in students' behavior, have led many to ask questions. What does it take for *all* students to become successful and contributing members of society? What is required to prevent any child from being *truly* left behind (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2003)? Further, why do some kids grow up with little struggle while others barely get by? Why do some kids get into trouble while others spend their time wisely, contributing to society? Why do some youth "bounce back" in difficult situations while others get stuck (Benson, Galbraith, & Espeland, 1998)? With all of these questions, there is a clear need for a solid, comprehensive youth policy that touches upon a variety of influences in children's lives and gives adults the tools and empowerment to make a difference in students' lives.

Despite this sense of urgency, the U.S. is the only Western nation without a national youth policy, a comprehensive set of beliefs and actions that support our youth. Our country and society is full of paradoxes such as this. We have access to countless resources, yet we still have children in poverty. Communication technology is booming in our country yet students have few people they can talk to about things that really matter. Adults spend billions of dollars on material things such as toys, games, and clothes and spend less time building relationships with children. Most adults know the

importance of providing support to students yet children are continually being cheated (Leffert et al., 1997).

Besides the increasing sense of urgency, there are a variety of other reasons why there is a need for a national youth policy and a greater awareness of what kids need to succeed. First, we are in an age of accountability. With the passage of President Bush's No Child Left Behind program, our country is being held accountable for the education of our children. However, accountability for behavior should also be demanded. It is known in the health behavior and prevention research area that elementary school performance predicts adolescent behavior (Flay, 2002). If this is the case, education programs need to go beyond mere basic skills and support all around well-being. Accountability needs to spread to areas such as the family and community. "Young people need *both* care and challenge to succeed in school" (Scales, 2001, p. 69). What policymakers and lobbyists fail to see is that the products of standardized tests are a result of more than just the curriculum and each child's "school readiness." The relationships in the school community have a powerful effect as well. These relationships include students with students, students with teachers and other staff, staff themselves, and everyone with parents and the community. All of these different dynamics are being missed by those involved in the standards movement, yet are among the strongest influences in student educational success (Scales, 2001).

There also needs to be a national youth policy because there needs to be a shift in the philosophy behind youth development models of the past. In the past, youth development models and programs have focused on the negative behaviors of students, focusing much of the attention on prevention programs. Problem-based approaches or

deficit models assume that there is something wrong in the individual and seek to correct deficiencies by equipping them with certain knowledge and skills (Witt, 2002). These kinds of models are reactive because programs based on this model are designed to help those already "troubled" (Krovetz, 1999). Cargo et al. (2003) put it nicely:

> "Owing to the biomedical view, which framed health as the absence of disease, adolescent health has become synonymous with their involvement in "risk behavior." This orientation, based on the needs or deficit model of health, bears the unfortunate consequence of stigmatizing adolescence as a life stage fraught with social problems" (p. 66).

Prevention programs based on this philosophy are and have been very prominent in U.S. communities. The average U.S. public school provides 14 prevention programs, and 90% of schools make available information about tobacco, alcohol, other drugs, violence, accidents, health, or risky sexual behavior. D.A.R.E, Drug Abuse Resistance Education, operates in 48% of elementary schools. While highly valuable, these prevention programs fail to address the multiple influences on youth and are ineffective in preventing substance abuse (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Sesma, 2004).

Luckily, recent efforts have been made to combine the typical curriculum, such as in D.A.R.E, with strategies to involve parents and the community (Benson et al., 2004). Prevention programs that are known to work take a more multifaceted approach and include various contexts of youth's lives, such as school and peers. The content goes beyond mere slogans and uses the social learning theory as a guide, which says that relationships are very important in learning behaviors and attitudes. Basically, successful prevention programs look beyond the surface (as cited in Scales & Leffert, 1999).

The recent efforts to improve prevention programs use the proactive model. The proactive model looks at the whole picture, which includes promoting positive behaviors and examining the multiple influences of students such as the home, school, and the community. This kind of model focuses on "strengthening the environment, not fixing kids" (Krovetz, 1999, p. 121). Also, in our world today all students are "at-risk" and in need of support, and youth models of the past have failed to include ALL students (Witt, 2002). Numerous studies have shown that ALL youth can benefit from focusing on the positive, even though those already "at-risk" benefit most (Scales, 2001). There needs to be a shift in our thinking. "Problem free is not fully prepared" and "fully prepared is not fully engaged" (as cited in Witt, 2002, p. 53). In other words, thriving goes beyond a mere absence of problem behaviors. Most parents and educators want more for students than simple avoidance. They also want children to be "happy and emotionally healthy, who have positive relationships with other people, and who contribute to the community" (Moore & Halle, 2000). Students need to "thrive not just survive" (Scales, 2001, p. 66).

It is important to note, though, that this focus on the positive does not disregard such factors as socioeconomic status, poverty, family break-up, etc. that may influence development. However, there are still those kids with such factors in their lives that somehow "rise above" their circumstances. This shows that there must be something that these students are getting that enables them to develop healthily. In sum, a youth policy needs to both help prevent certain behaviors as well as increase pro-social attitudes and skills in ALL children.

This focus on the negative hasn't just been in the minds of professionals. The public's perception of youth vs. the reality has been faulty as well, and this is another

reason why there needs to be a national youth policy and a greater awareness of what kids need to succeed. This false perception may affect how involved adults are in students' lives. Adults in a recent Public Agenda Poll (as cited in Moore & Halle, 2000) expressed negative views of teenagers, calling them "rude," "irresponsible," and "wild." It's ironic that parents have commented on wanting more for their children, yet as a whole, our nation's "collective aspirations" have been focused on mere avoidance of problems (Moore & Halle, 2000). This limited thinking, both in the approach to youth development and in attitudes toward youth has led our nation to overestimating the frequency of negative behaviors and an overall bleak view of the future of our youth.

These negative views of youth and false perception of how youth are doing seem to be caused or at least reinforced by the media. First, most of the coverage is negative and focused mostly on problems. Although many may argue that the media isn't as influential as some think, due to the fact that fewer households have children and fewer children are in the population, personal experience is becoming less influential and the media is becoming more influential. In other words, first-hand knowledge is lacking (Scales, 2001).

Also, while social science shows that problems such as teen pregnancy and drug use are getting better, the average American does not know that. The media does report on some declines in crime, but youth are rarely given credit for it (Scales, 2001). A poll done by Child Trends, a nonpartisan, independent research center for children and families, sought to find out how well perception matches reality and found that most Americans think that youth are worse off than they are. They are either unaware or do not make note of progress made during the last decade. For example, 74% believe that

since the 1996 federal welfare law there has been no change, or the number of children on welfare has increased. Also, 91% believe that the number of teens involved in violent crimes has either increased or stayed the same in the last ten years even though it is at its lowest level in more than 25 years (Guzman, Lippman, Moore, & O'hare, 2003).

What's mainly lacking is coverage of "what's going right with American youth" (Scales, 2001, p.65). In other words, the media needs to show the reality of the majority of our youth, the reality that patterns of at-risk behavior are either non-existent or improving. If the media were to report on more positive youth behaviors, adults may be more apt to take action because they wouldn't feel so overwhelmed with the problems with today's youth. Scales (2001) notes several realities of our youth today compared with the period of 1985-1990. A greater proportion than ever are graduating from high school, with African American rates nearly equal to whites! Fewer adolescents are having intercourse, and those who are are more consistent in their use of protection, leading to fewer teen pregnancies. Teenagers volunteer more than adults, in contrast to the view that adolescents are selfish. More teens are relying on their families for advice and support.

The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics provides more insight into the reality for our youth. In its annual report titled *America's Children Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2003*, it is reported that "infant and childhood death rates continuing to decline, fewer adolescents are smoking, fewer children are exposed to second hand smoke, fewer adolescent girls are giving birth, and more adolescents are taking honors courses." In addition, "the percentage of children with health insurance remained at the previous year's all time high, the child poverty rate leveled off after years

of decline, the percentage of children living in married, two-parent families have remained the same, and the percentages of children living in households reporting any housing problems has not changed since 1995" (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics).

According to Peter Scales (2001), a developmental psychologist and a senior fellow for Search Institute, only 20-33 percent of adolescents experience one or more of the following problems: school failure, drug use, or teen pregnancy. Scales also distinguishes between patterns of behavior and experimentation, saying that it is normal for teens to experiment while patterns of behavior are more what adults should call "risky."

The Child Trend's poll as well as other studies comparing perception vs. reality have important implications for both public policy and private investment in youth. It will probably be more difficult to gain the support needed to develop effective policies and programs if youth are continually looked at through a "negative lens" (Guzman et al., 2003). The research group Public Agenda did a national poll in 1997 that showed "that the more media focus is given to huge, impossibly complex social problems among children and youth, the less the typical community resident feels able to do anything about the situation" (Scales, 2001, p. 65). Instead of focusing on something like how people are preventing teen pregnancy, the media should show something more "doable" by most people, such as setting a consistent example of taking responsibility for behavior and explaining why it's important.

Grading Grownups 2000, a recent telephone survey of more than 2,000 youth and adults by Search Institute, reveals further the impact perception has on involvement.

There is a significant gap between what adults feel students need and what they are actually giving. The survey was designed to reveal how adults are or are not positively influencing "other people's kids." In the study, both adults and youth ages 12 to 17 were asked about their relations with people outside of their own family. Both adults and youth agreed that the following were the most important to provide for youth: encouraging school success, teaching shared values, and teaching respect for cultural differences. Although there was agreement in what was important, there were differences in what was ranked by youth and adults, with youth most often providing lower rankings. **Table 1** in the **Appendix** shows the rankings (Scales, Benson, & Mannes, 2002).

Although there was strong agreement about what is important for adults to provide for youth, there was also agreement that most of these things were not happening. Out of 18 actions studied, only the top three ranked were reported as happening regularly. **Table 2** shows what adults and youth view as what is happening. It's interesting to note that 42% of adults feel they and other adults report positive behavior, yet only 3% of youth feel that adults engage this way (Scales et al., 2002). Maybe this is yet another indication of adults' negative attitude toward youth?

The power of social expectations was revealed in this study as well. A strong link between expectations for involvement and actual involvement was found. In other words, adults who surrounded themselves with adults who expected them to be involved were more likely to be involved. Just 17% of adults felt a strong expectation to be involved (Scales et al., 2002). In another piece of work, Scales (2001) lists other reasons for noninvolvement caused by social expectations. Adults may worry about a family's right to privacy, are unsure about the appropriateness of a sexual conversation or a

relationship with a young person not their own child, or feel that the teens would laugh at the effort.

So, why should we be concerned about supporting a national youth development model? First, our societal changes are influencing the infrastructure of positive youth development, and there is an increased sense of urgency to help youth succeed. Next, we are in an age of accountability that demands more educational gains, which needs to include developmental gains as well. Third, youth development models of the past have focused on problem behaviors of youth instead of how positive behaviors can be promoted. This has led to an overall bleak view of not only youth but of their future. Finally, due in part to this bleak view, belief and action are not matching up in adults. We need a revolution!

Since the late 1980s the Search Institute has been a part of an ongoing effort to provide that revolution in how we aide youth's development. *Grading Grownups 2002* is one of many studies aimed to "better understand the influence of social and cultural dynamics on the development of children and youth" (Scales et al., 2002). Most all of this research is focused on the *40 Developmental Assets*, "the relationships, experiences, opportunities, and personal qualities that children and youth need to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible" (Scales et al., 2002). Richard M. Lerner, Ph. D from the Center for Child, Family, and Community Partnerships at Boston College, says, "No institution is doing more to enhance understanding of the bases of positive development of your nation's youth. And no institution is adding more to the momentum building in the United States for the creation of a national youth policy based on developmental assets and their role in promoting positive youth development" (Scales & Leffert, 1999, xi).

The Search Institute: Background and Research on the 40 Developmental Assets

Foundations of Asset Research

For decades research has accumulated regarding youth development. However researchers have spent most of their efforts on prevention and consider the best use of resources to be the study of "basic" issues (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Also, several factors such as peer influence and family dynamics that have the potential to have life-long positive impacts on students have been studied, but they have been treated in isolation ("Background and history"). However, since 1989, the Search Institute has aimed to present the nation with a different "conception" of our youth and their development that combines basic processes in positive development and a clear agenda for the purposes of applying such knowledge (Scales & Leffert, 1999).

The research of the Search Institute has been rooted in four major goals. First, it seeks to provide a common language for what youth need for positive development. Second, it aims to create a unified vision for positive development that will allow for a public consensus about what youth need to succeed. Third, the research provides empowerment for people from all kinds of societal organizations: residents, families, neighborhoods, youth organizations, religious institutions, etc. to take action. Finally, through the results of its research that shows how our youth are doing, communities are also called to action to strengthen their efforts in supporting youths' positive development (Benson, 2002).

The research of the Search Institute combines many areas of research and several theories. Besides having roots in research on adolescent development, the 40

Developmental Assets also grew from research in prevention. As mentioned earlier, prevention focuses on things that inhibit high-risk behaviors. Asset research has also grown from research on resiliency, which identifies certain factors that aide in students' ability to "bounce back" from adversity ("Background and history"). In the view of the Search Institute, "a wealth of literature regarding the behavior and development of adolescents and the interpersonal and institutional influences on their behavior may be integrated and extended by the conceptual and empirical features of the developmental asset model" (Scales & Leffert, 1999, x).

Initially, the assets were formulated to be framed around the middle and high school years. The focus was on finding developmental experiences that were known to produce the following health outcomes: (1) prevention of high-risk behaviors (such as substance abuse and violence); (2) increase in thriving behaviors (such as school success); and (3) resiliency (Benson, 2002). Asset-building communities have four targets: (1) vertical accumulation of assets, where youth keep experiencing more assets; (2) horizontal accumulation of assets, where youth experience assets in multiple circumstances and contexts (such as families, schools, and neighborhoods); (3) chronological accumulation, in which assets are reinforced over time; and (4) developmental breadth, where assets are promoted in ALL children and youth, not just those at risk (Benson et al., 2004).

Asset Categories

The assets are divided into categories that are easily understood, which coincides with the Search Institute's goal of mobilizing communities. See **Table 3** for a full asset list. First, they are divided into twenty external assets and twenty internal assets.

External assets are characteristics of the environment that promote positive development. These assets grow as students take part in positive interactions with adults and peers and can be reinforced by community institutions. Internal assets are within youth and include attitudes, commitments, values, etc. These take longer to develop because they are within the student and are therefore more complex and require more "self-regulation" (Benson, 2002).

Within these categories there are a variety of subcategories. The external assets are divided into four categories: (1) support, (2) empowerment, (3) boundaries and expectations, and (4) constructive use of time. The support assets refer to a range of exposures to approval, encouragement, and acceptance from a variety of sources, such a family, school personnel, neighbors, etc. The empowerment assets pertain to factors that contribute to students' feeling of usefulness in society. The boundaries and expectations assets point out the importance of students' knowledge of what is expected of them and the presence of adults and peers that model responsible behavior. The constructive-use-of-time assets include the variety of ways that students can effectively use their time (Benson, 2002).

The internal assets are divided into four categories: (1) commitment to learning, (2) positive values, (3) social competencies, and (4) positive identity. The commitment to learning assets "include a combination of personal beliefs, values, and skills known to enhance academic success" (Benson, 2002). The positive values assets represent a set of values necessary for students to make good choices as well as develop strong character. The social competencies assets are a set of skills that help students deal with "the myriad choices, challenges, and opportunities presented in a complex society" (Benson, 2002).

The positive identity assets focus on the need for students to develop a strong sense of worth and promise.

It is important to note that the Search Institute has also developed a list of assets for early childhood, middle childhood and elementary age children. Each list is almost identical to the adolescent list, which is the list that has been studied the most. The major difference is how the description of each asset is developmentally appropriate for the child (Leffert et al., 1997). For instance, the infant description for the support asset of other adult relationships says, "Parents have support from three or more adults and ask for help when needed." The adolescent description says, "Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults" ("Forty developmental assets"). When developing the list, researchers asked the following questions based on what they already new about the assets in adolescents: "What do these assets look like in infancy? At age five? At age 11? How do adults nurture these assets over time" (Leffert et al., 1997, 11)?

It is clear to see that the responsibility for building assets is put more on adults the younger the children are. Children see the attitudes of the adults as well as their external behavior, taking their environment in by what they see, hear, and feel. They eventually learn to take in these attitudes and behaviors as their own (Leffert et al., 1997). Studying how assets benefit children is a future focus of the Search Institute, but it can presently be assumed that the results of studies done with the adolescent list can be transferred to "youth" of all ages.

Research on the Developmental Assets

The goal of asset building is not perfection. Its ultimate goal is "facilitating and helping to nurture the opportunities, skills, relationships, values, and self-perception that

all young people need and deserve" ("Making a difference"). The Search Institute wants to promote a common language that everyone involved in students' lives can use in order to be empowered to make a difference. Throughout their research, the Search Institute has developed six principles that have specific "implications for how communities, organizations, and individuals use these assets" (Leffert et al., 1999, p. 22).

- Everyone can build assets.
- All young people need assets.
- Relationships are key.
- Asset building is an ongoing process.
- Intentional redundancy is important.
- Consistency is essential.

The concept of the forty developmental assets was first introduced in 1990 in a report titled *The Troubled Journey: A Portrait of 6th-12th Grade Youth* (Leffert et al., 1997). This report and many thereafter were based on a survey that was designed to measure developmental assets called *Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors* (Benson, 2002). Early in the research, only 30 developmental assets were identified and measured. During the period of 1990-1995, the Search Institute diligently studied the assets, surveying more than 350,000 6th-12th graders in more than 600 communities. They wanted to "learn about the developmental assets [youth] experienced, the risks they took, the deficits they had to overcome, and the ways they thrived" ("Background and history"). Surveys and studies weren't the only ways that Search Institute conducted research. They also conducted many informal discussions and focus groups to better understand the experiences and realities of youth at higher risk. As a result of such

research, the model was revised to 40 developmental assets in 1996 to include more elaboration on safety and cultural competence ("Background and history"). Another change took place recently involving the data-set. The Search Institute updated the data-set and involved over 217,000 6^{th} -12^{th} graders in over 300 communities from the 1999-2000 school year in order to update the information and include more diversity. There was still an overpowering number of majority non-urban youth, and they could not make any conclusions based on change because the communities involved were different. However, the Search Institute still says that too few assets are experienced by too many youth and that the challenge to help build assets is still present ("The updated profiles").

The following tables from the Search Institute website illustrate the results of their most recent survey. They found that the average youth experiences only 19.3 of the 40 assets when at least 31 is considered the goal. Only 9% of youth have 31 or more assets ("Percentages").

Average Number of Assets by Grade and Gender

Total Sample	**19.3**

Grade	
6^{th}	23.1
7^{th}	21.1
8^{th}	19.6
9^{th}	18.3
10th	17.8
11th	18.1
12th	18.3

Gender	
Female	20.7
Male	17.8

The Gap of Assets Among Youth

	Total Sample
0-10 Assets	15%
11-20 Assets	41%
21-30 Assets	35%
31-40 Assets	9%

The percentage of youth experiencing each asset varies widely. By examining the tables below, it is interesting to note the strong and weak areas of asset building. Surprisingly, family support is high, with 70% of youth experiencing this asset. This seems to be in contrast to the common idea that the family structure is crumbling and might give much more encouragement to promote this asset. In contrast, the creative activities asset is reported in only 20 % of youth, and the reading for pleasure asset is reported in only 23% of youth. This finding may have something to do with the perceived rise in television watching and video game playing as an everyday activity. It can also serve as fuel for the movement of encouraging the value of reading in students.

External Assets

Support

1. Family support	70%
2. Positive family communication	30%
3. Other adult relationships	45%
4. Caring neighborhood	40%
5. Caring school climate	29%
6. Parent involvement in schooling	34%

Empowerment

7. Community values youth	25%
8. Youth as resources	28%
9. Service to others	51%
10. Safety	51%

Boundaries and Expectations

11. Family boundaries	48%
12. School boundaries	53%
13. Neighborhood boundaries	49%
14. Adult role models	30%
15. Positive peer influence	65%
16. High expectations	49%

Constructive Use of Time

17. Creative activities	20%
18. Youth programs	58%
19. Religious community	63%
20. Time at home	52%

Internal Assets

Commitment to Learning

21. Achievement motivation	67%
22. School engagement	61%
23. Homework	53%
24. Bonding to school	54%
25. Reading for pleasure	23%

Positive Values

26. Caring	50%
27. Equality and social justice	52%
28. Integrity	68%
29. Honesty	67%
30. Responsibility	63%
31. Restraint	47%

So what value do the assets have in students' lives? The study shows that assets not only help prevent problem behaviors but also help promote positive attitudes and behaviors, showing the comprehensive effect that assets have on youth. The tables below show the results from the study.

Protecting Youth from High-Risk Behaviors

	0-10 Assets	11-20 Assets	21-30 Assets	31-40 Assets
Problem Alcohol Use	49%	27%	11%	3%
Violence	61%	38%	19%	7%
Illicit Drug Use	39%	18%	6%	1%
Sexual Activity	32%	21%	11%	3%

Promoting Positive Attitudes and Behaviors

	0-10 Assets	11-20 Assets	21-30 Assets	31-40 Assets
Exhibits Leadership	50%	65%	77%	85%
Maintains Good Health	26%	47%	69%	89%
Values Diversity	36%	57%	74%	88%
Succeeds in School	8%	17%	30%	47%

Current Research on the 40 Developmental Assets

The research done by the Search Institute has in no way stopped at the *Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors*. They continue to deepen their knowledge of what kids need to succeed and the impact the assets have on ALL youth. Both current and future research is driven by this goal. The two major areas of study are positive human development and community and social change.

In the area of positive human development, the main focus is strengthening knowledge in the measurement and also the value of developmental assets. Studies underway currently include the assets in the first decade of life, relationships between the assets and academic achievement, and risk and pro-social behaviors. Major projects include "new indicators of thriving among youth" and also a study on child and adolescent spiritual development ("Positive human development").

Community and social change studies focus on the implications that the assets have for the community and society, namely how both groups can impact and reinforce positive human development. This area of the Search Institute wants to understand how to create asset-building citizens, schools, congregations, neighborhoods, and youth organizations. They are currently producing a number of case studies that help to identify successful practices. The community and social change team also is examining society, namely social norms, the media, and public policy, and how they can support human development ("Community and social change"). The following are results from key studies in both the Positive Development and Community and Social Change departments of the Search Institute. The Search Institute's website, http://www.search-

institute.org, is a phenomenal resource for up-to-date information on the current and future research.

Developmental Assets in Minority Youth

In the area of positive human development, a recent study sought to determine whether youth of color benefit as much from assets as other youth do. Today, about one-third of youth are people of color, and that number is expected to rise to forty-five percent by 2020 (as cited in Sesma & Roehlkepartain, 2003). It is only natural that as our society becomes more diverse, it becomes increasingly important that the needs of ALL youth are being met. Sesma and Roehlkepartain (2003) bring attention to the views that some hold today, saying that there seems to be a polarization in what is emphasized when talking about the needs of minorities. Some focus on the experiences and realities unique to minorities, while others focus on the "shared characteristics and needs that are relevant across multiple racial/ethnic groups" (Sesma & Roehlkepartain, 2003, p. 1).

Recently, a new analysis of the Search Institutes survey showed that the assets play an important role in the development of youth across all six of the racial/ethnic groups surveyed: African American, American Indian, Asian American, Latino/Latina, White, and multi-racial youth (Sesma & Roehlkepartain, 2003). This new analysis also showed that different groups had different outcomes result from certain asset categories. Unity and diversity are represented in these findings, which encourage adults to embrace uniqueness while also nurturing shared realities when providing opportunities for ALL students to succeed.

Sesma & Roehlkepartain (2003) bring attention to the specific similarities and differences among youth of color in the results of their experience of assets. Particularly,

the assets in the commitment-to learning and support category are shown as equally powerful across all groups represented. In contrast, American Indian and White youth seem to be more prone to antisocial behavior due in part to a lack of support assets. Also, constructive-use-of-time assets seem to be most related to school success for American Indian and Asian American youth. This analysis does not show causal relationships or why the patterns are different, but it is a start. In the least, it shows those involved with youth the importance of considering how assets work in specific racial/ethnic groups.

María Guajardo Lucero (as cited in Sesma & Roehlkepartain, 2003), former executive director of Assets for Colorado Youth, says, "For the asset message to be most effective, it needs to be culturally inclusive, relevant across ethnicities, and respectful of the diverse approaches to nurturing a child" (p. 8). Future research will focus on the following: (1) developmental assets and other forms of diversity; (2) deeper examination of variability within groups; (3) dialogue with culturally grounded models of development; (4) examining culturally specific meanings behind developmental assets and asset-building efforts; and (5) exploring asset-building strengths within specific communities (Sesma & Roehlkepartain, 2003). This research is aimed to gain a better understanding of healthy development of minority youth while also reminding youth workers of the similarities across cultures, which provides even more motivation to make assets the "language for the common good" (Sesma & Roehlkepartain, 2003).

The Power of Assets in Boosting Student Achievement

As mentioned, we are in an age of accountability in education. Due to the recent passing of No Child Left Behind, teachers and administrators are scrambling to get their students ready for the yearly standardized tests, tests that have high-stakes and can result

in a number of positive and negative outcomes for the schools. Educators are asking numerous questions: "What do we need to do to increase academic success in our schools? What does it take for *all* students to learn and become successful, contributing members of society? What will it take to ensure that no child is *truly* "left behind" (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2003, p.1). Educators are feeling such a strong sense of urgency but are coming up empty handed when searching for a single strategy or program that makes a significant difference.

However, the Search Institute's Positive Human Development team's current research illustrates the potential for assets to have a powerful influence on the academic success of students from various backgrounds and communities. In comparison to other educational reform and practice efforts, such as Success for All and Corner School Development, the assets have a 10 times greater effect! In the past, research on the relationship between assets and academic achievement have focused on self-reports, which does not help in seeing the link to actual achievement (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2003). Currently, assets are linked to school records, and longitudinal data is now accessible, both of which are opening the doors for exploring how assets contribute to academic achievement. This study has HUGE implications for educators!

The data used in this study was from St. Louis Park, Minnesota. The data came from 370 students who were followed from when they were in 6^{th} to 8^{th} grade to when they were in 10^{th} to 12^{th} grade. Unfortunately, the sample was 84% white and over half of students had college graduate parents, so this data may not be able to be generalized. On the positive side, this is the first study that looks at the assets-achievement relationship over time (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2003).

The results show that higher levels of assets are correlated to GPA both presently and longitudinally, and the GPA rises steadily as the levels of assets rise. Shockingly, the more assets that were reported in 1998, the higher the GPA was three years later! Also, the research looked at how GPA changed when levels of assets changed. For each one asset-increase, GPA went up one fifth of a grade point. In simpler terms, a five asset-increase would result in a change of a full grade point in a 4-point scale. It should be noted that research has shown that GPA remains relatively stable over time. Therefore, it must take significant changes for it to change, and this research shows just that. In addition, although more research is needed, preliminary findings show that high levels of assets may also be linked to higher standardized test scores (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2003). More research is needed to make more clear what kinds of interventions led to such a change. Observation of one school district showed the following interventions: (1) teacher training in what the assets were and the asset-building principles; (2) reduced class size; (3) implementation of "I Time" which focuses on such things as team building, communication skills, social competencies, chemical health, etc. in 9th grade students; (4) development of clear norms and expectations; and (5) increased cooperation among a variety of staff (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2003).

More research is also needed in how assets and achievement are linked in more diverse situations in hopes that assets may help reduce gaps in achievement. However, some findings were evident in the recent sample. For example, females and males experience a similar relationship between GPA and asset levels. In regards to family income, "The overall correlation between the number of assets in 1998 and GPA in 2001 was larger for students whose mothers had only a high school education or less than it

was for students whose mothers had at least some college" (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2003, p.6).

Other areas still needing to be studied include following students from grades K-12, and discovering how to implement asset-building strategies in the classroom through both curriculum and instruction. Also, there are considerable policy and practice implications as a result of this research, and these implications can help meet the goals of No Child Left Behind, both in academics and in life. First, there is the idea of infusing asset-building into schools, not necessarily implementing the traditional more expensive programs. Second, too often teachers are left by themselves to have the responsibility of achievement. Asset-building helps to alleviate that pressure and taps into the skills of ALL staff members. Third, asset-building motivates schools to be more connected to students' families and communities to help students to be more successful.

The findings in this study may suggest that instead of trying to boost achievement by only "emphasizing task mastery, requiring higher teacher certification standards, and using high-stakes testing to track achievement" (Sesma & Roehlkepartain, 2003, p. 9), we should additionally promote overall well-being of our students through asset-building. In the long run, do we want our students to merely master skills or be successful and healthy in all areas of life? Standards-focused schools need to realize that they are responsible for more.

Building Strong Families

The Community and Social Change team has put a great amount of their focus on the family in recent years, asking the question, "What do parents need to succeed?" A recent preliminary study titled *Building Strong Families* was initiated by the Abundant

Assets Alliance between the YMCA of the USA, YMCA Canada, and the Search Institute. The study explored such a question in the form of a poll. The poll of 1,005 U.S. parents found that parents seem to feel quite confident in their abilities, yet do not have the encouragement and support that they feel they need to overcome the everyday challenges of parenting (Roehlkepartain, Scales, Roehlkepartain, Gallo, and Rude, 2002). Key highlights of the study can be found below.

Finding #1 says that too many parents are "going it alone", reporting that they rarely seek out the help of valuable sources such as immediate or extended family, friends, and community resources. They are less likely to seek help from the community, except for African Americans who report seeking help from community. Luckily, though, parents appear to be very open to learning new things, reporting wanting the most help in parenting their teen, patience, and wanting opportunities to learn from "veterans". Eight percent expressed a desire to learn more (Roehlkepartain et al., 2002)!

Finding #2 says that many parents lack a strong relationship with a spouse or partner, which is a key resource for parents. Having an "excellent" partner relationship proved to have the biggest impact on having a "wide range of parenting dynamics" (Roehlkepartain et al., 2002, p. 4). Interestingly, marriage was not proven to guarantee a strong relationship. Statistically, 56% of married parents vs. 36% of unmarried parents reported a strong relationship. This may have implications for the common perception that children need both parents to thrive.

Finding #3 states that the majority of parents feel successful most of the time, and this finding is true for mothers and fathers and for all types of families with varying backgrounds. It was also found that parents have high standards and list the following for

a definition of a successful parents: (1) Their children are respectful, well-behaved, and have good values; (2) They give love; (3) They are invested in their children's lives; and (4) They help their children to lead a "healthy, productive, successful life" (Roehlkepartain, et al., 2002, p. 6).

Despite this feeling of success, most parents face continuing challenges, according to finding #4. The things that make parenting harder most often are job demands and sibling arguing. It was also found that there is a set of factors that seem to lead to more challenges, including being unmarried, financially struggling, having child-care outside of the home, and having a poor relationship with their partner. Parents also reported being dissatisfied at times for a variety of reasons. Fifty-two percent get distressed when something unexpected takes place. Forty-six percent feel overwhelmed by everything. Finally, thirty-four percent feel unsupported by family or friends.

Interestingly enough, finding #5 reveals that many of the things that parents think would help them are easy for those around them to do, such as compliments about their parenting and talking with other parents about issues. This is a clear indication that more can be done to help parents to succeed. Peter L. Benson, Ph.D., President of Search Institute says, "Parents are central-but often unappreciated-players in kids' healthy development. This study underscores the many positive things parents are doing for their kids. And it challenges everyone in communities to rally together to build strong families and strong kids" (Roehlkepartain et al., 2002).

Building Strong Families 2004

A major flaw in the previously mentioned study is that it did not adequately represent parents of color. Therefore, a similar poll made up of 685 African American

and 639 Latino/Latina parents was conducted in 2004 by the Abundant Asset Alliance, since these two groups represent the two largest communities of color. They hoped to not only deepen their knowledge of what parents need to succeed but also find some "dynamics" that are unique to these populations in order to meet the needs of ALL parents (Roehlkepartain, Mannes, Scales, Lewis, & Bolstrom, 2004).

The major finding was that the majority of parents are working hard to ensure the success and well-being of their children, and that they feel successful most of the time. However, they face consistent challenges and receive little support, both of these findings being consistent with the 2002 study. There is a key difference in the results, however. The challenges that these parents face go beyond their immediate family. In other words, they do not feel like bickering among their children is a challenge. Their challenges come mainly from economic issues, with job loss being the #1 challenge, and protecting their children from negative influences as another. Latino/Latina parents also face the challenge of not being fluent in English (Roehlkepartain et al., 2004).

Relationships were found to be very important to African American and Latino/Latina families. The support that they value the most comes from positive relationships within the family and the community. Also, the thing that would help them to be better parents is spending more time with their children. (Roehlkepartain et al., 2004).

What is fascinating about both of these studies on families is that despite the blame that is put on parents for children's problems, parents are working hard to ensure the well-being of their children even when they lack community assistance. "Yes, the parents in this (the 2004 study) study-many of whom are from low-income families-

struggle (as evident from the length of comments from the focus groups on the challenges they face). But the most important story may be that they *are* struggling, not giving up or letting go" (Roehlkepartain et al., 2004, p. 19). Roehlkepartain et al. (2004) suggest an even deeper meaning from this study. We need to evaluate how we view and support parents. Maybe it is similar to how our society seems to view youth? Our false perception may be detrimental to efforts to support parents. We must remember that good parenting just like youth thrive in a community that is supportive and invested.

Asset-building and Substance Abuse Prevention

Another focus of the Community and Social Change sector of the Search Institute has been to discern how best to use the community to strengthen substance abuse prevention. It has been noted earlier that prevention programs, while valuable to some degree, do not address the needs of youth because they fail to consider the context in which behaviors take place. Substance abuse is one of those behaviors. Search Institute believes that asset-building in the community "has significant potential to complement, strengthen, and expand substance use prevention efforts through community-building strategies that unleash public commitment, passion, and capacity" (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Sesma, 2004, p.1).

The recent analysis of the new dataset revealed some interesting insights into the power of assets when preventing substance abuse. Basically, "When they accumulate in young people's lives, developmental assets are powerfully related to lower levels (and delayed onset) of multiple forms of ATOD (alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs) use and other outcomes, regardless of young people's socioeconomic, family, or racial/ethnic background" (Benson et al., 2003, p. 3). The latter statement is probably the most

shocking. It was found that assets have more of an impact than demographic factors in ATOD use! Youth with a low socioeconomic status are 1.3 to 1.4 times more likely to engage in ATOD use. In contrast, youth with 0-10 assets are at least three times as likely than youth with 21-40 assets to engage in ATOD use. Demographic factors seem to drive our society's concern with student's well-being, but this finding adds further fuel to the argument that using a more proactive effort, such as asset-building, is more beneficial to youth (Benson et al., 2003).

So what does all of this mean for prevention practices? First, Benson et al. (2003) clarify the distinction between the definition of assets and protective factors, since there seems to be a need for a shift from mere prevention efforts to comprehensive asset-building efforts. They compare protective factors to air bags because they are defined by what they do in a crash. Protective factors seem to only function in a situation of risk. In contrast, assets promote positive development no matter if the child is or is not at risk. Also, they not only prevent risky behavior (like protective factors) but also promote thriving. Benson (2003) sums up the distinction by commenting that assets "represent a broader area of development than protective factors" (p. 7). Due to the "overlap" of these two terms, prevention efforts these days are beginning to weave together both preventing problem behaviors and promoting thriving.

Principles of effective prevention programs are defined by a recent issue of *American Psychologist* (as cited in Benson et al., 2003, p. 7). They must be comprehensive, taking into account the context in which behaviors are taking place. Varied teaching methods are required so that youth may be made more aware but also so that they may have the necessary skills to avoid risky behaviors. Prevention programs

must also be theory driven, considering the most recent and accurate information. They must encourage positive relationships with adults and youth and be appropriately timed in terms of development. In addition, they must take into consideration the community and cultural needs by being socioculturally relevevant. Finally, the staff must be well-trained and there must be some type of outcome evaluation related to the goals and objectives of the program (Benson et al., 2003).

There continues to be major challenges in the prevention of substance abuse even with the addition of asset development. The biggest challenge is the gap between programs that are designed and studied and programs that are actually implemented well. More studies of specific programs that have been successful will be needed. Other challenges include getting the needed funding, ensuring that programs fit with schools' overall mission, ensuring that programs fit the culture, needs, and resources of the area, and fixing the gap between the science and practice of prevention (Benson et al., 2003). In sum, "prevention programs are necessary, but not sufficient, to substantially reduce overall ATOD use among adolescents for the long term" (Benson et al., 2003, p. 9). While progress has been made, continued efforts need to be made to alleviate the above challenges and empower those working with youth to get to the root of the problem: a lack of assets.

Support for the Search Institute's Research

Research is useless unless correlated with other research in the field. As mentioned earlier, "a wealth of literature regarding the behavior and development of adolescents and the interpersonal and institutional influences on their behavior may be integrated and extended by the conceptual and empirical features of the development

asset model" (Scales & Leffert, 1999, x). Search Institute wants to create a comprehensive view of youth and has worked to integrate and extend the work of researchers in the field of youth development. All of these efforts aim toward the goal of a national youth policy. Support for the Search Institute's Research is vast. First, recent research on at-risk students supports a need for both prevention and asset building efforts and identifies "assets" kids need to succeed. Second, research supporting the need for specific assets is innumerable. Third, other youth organizations and national initiatives provide the greatest support for a national youth policy. There is agreement that there needs to be a change in how we view youth, their development, and how we as adults play a role in their lives.

Research on Risk

One cannot read much research on at-risk students today that doesn't mention support for the philosophy held by the Search Institute that there is a need for combining prevention efforts with asset-building efforts. Just as the Search Institute was influenced by research on resilience, so is other research on at-risk students (Keogh, 2000). It has fascinated researchers for quite some time why some students cope in the face of adversity, and resiliency provides strong evidence that there must exist factors in at-risk students' lives that enable them to develop healthily despite risk factors.

Researchers in this area now view the child in context rather than focusing specifically on one kind of risk. Norman Garmezy, writer of the Foreword in a book called *Vulnerable But Invincible* speaks of this philosophy, saying, "Were we to study the forces that move children to survival and to adaptation, the long-range benefits to our society might be far more significant than are the many efforts to construct models of

primary prevention to curtail the incidence of vulnerability" (as cited in Keogh, 2000). This has pushed research in the area of risk more toward examining the multiple influences that contribute to healthy development. These influences include both environments, like the family and school, and personal characteristics, these influences being synonymous with some of the influences the Search Institute has identified (Keogh, 2000).

Now that research is shifting away from focusing on mere prevention of risk, many may ask, "What does current research say, then, about combining prevention efforts with asset-building efforts? Is one more superior than the other?" The answer is, "No!" Both have found to be essential in programs that aide in youth development. Some have erroneously said that focusing on promoting resilience is superior, and others have said that focusing just on the resilience of youth emphasizes the characteristics within individuals and ignores social and contextual risk factors (Pollard & Hawkins, 1999).

A recent study by Pollard & Hawkins (1999) sought to gain insight into whether or not both risk factors and assets are necessary when trying to understand behavior in youth. They found that: 1) Just focusing on assets is an incomplete strategy; and 2) There is a unique relationship between the levels of risk and assets. According to the study, building assets with students not at-risk won't necessarily reduce the occurrence of at-risk behavior because occurrence is already low. Also, high levels of assets didn't eliminate problem behaviors. In regards to the relationship between risk and assets, support for a "buffering hypothesis" was found. Basically, assets were found to moderate the negative effects of risk exposure. This is evidenced by the finding that reduction in the occurrence

of problem behaviors tied with higher levels of assets was greatest when risk was the highest (Pollard & Hawkins, 1999).

In sum, not only was asset research based on research on prevention and resilience, it is now able to be correlated with current research in the same areas. This makes research done by the Search Institute and the ideas presented even more credible and able to be trusted.

Support for the Social Competency Assets

A recent review of over 360 studies related to social competency in teens aimed to better understand how teens gain the skills to make and maintain healthy relationships. Child Trends, a non-profit research organization, looked at factors that help develop social competency and effective intervention strategies (Hair, Jager, & Garrett, 2002). Social competency is defined as "the ability to achieve personal goals in social interaction while at the same time maintaining positive relationships with others over time and across situations" (as cited in Hair et al., 2002, p. 1).

Relationships that are seen as important in the healthy development of adolescent social competency are those with parents, siblings, other adult family members, other adults, and peers. All of these relationships are covered in the 40 developmental assets. Good relationships with parents are related to conflict resolution skills and intimacy. They also aide in developing other relationships with friends and romantic partners. Sibling relationships can "protect teens from family stress and may enhance cognitive development" (as cited in Hair et al., 2002, p. 2).

Other adults within the family, such as grandparents can be role models, teachers, and supporters. Other adults outside the family serve as an additional adult that can

provide another secure bond. They can "teach social skills, model behavior, give positive or negative reinforcement, introduce young people to diverse social interactions and context...provide advice, emotional support, companionship, opportunities for socialization, and even real-life examples of positive social relationships that teens may not find at home" (as cited in Hair et al., 2002, p. 2). Peer relationships can help teens to develop "interpersonal skills, autonomy, positive mental health, self-confidence, and satisfactions with social support", help them to "make joint decisions, express empathy, and deepen their perspectives", and appear to "discourage aggression, emotional distress, and antisocial behaviors" (as cited in Hair et al., 2002, p. 2).

Social skills that Child Trends have identified as important in youth's development are interpersonal skills like conflict resolution, intimacy, and prosocial behaviors. Individual attributes that are desirable include self-control and behavior regulation, social confidence, and empathy. Teens who develop conflict resolution skills and possess self-control and behavior regulation are able to communicate their feelings effectively and thus be more accepted by their peers and develop more friendships. Teens that have the skill of intimacy, those who are able to form emotional bonds with people, are "more interested in school, perform better academically, are better adjusted socially, and show stronger relationships with parents and peers" (as cited in Hail et al., 2002, p. 3). Teens with social confidence feel more accepted and less lonely, and empathy is the key to relationships of many kinds.

What helps teens develop socials skills? Positive relationships, mentoring programs, education and social skills training programs, warm and responsive parenting, peer acceptance, and programs aimed at specific skills help in development. More steps

are needed in research in specific areas such as long-term studies on the development of social skills, specific research on the development of relationships outside the family, and additional research on the development of specific skills (as cited in Hail et al., 2002).

Support for the Support Assets

Child Trends also cites an increased interest in mentoring programs, with adults wanting to give back to their community, but they recently reviewed studies of ten mentoring programs in order to determine if young people actually benefit from mentoring programs. They define mentoring as, "a sustained relationship between a young person and an adult in which the adult proides the young person with support, guidance, and assistance" (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002, p. 1).

Programs tend to vary in regards to goals, emphasis, and structure, but they all tend to be based in the community, not the school. The review looked at the three areas targeted for improvement as a result of mentoring: educational achievement, health and safety, and social and emotional development. In speaking of educational achievement, youth in mentoring programs tend to have better attendance at school, a better chance of going on to higher education, and better attitudes to school. Students in Big Brothers/Big Sisters skipped half as many days of school. Youth enrolled in Career Beginnings were somewhat more likely to attend college than the control group, with 53% enrolled in college immediately after high school graduation and only 49% in the control group. More evaluation is needed in order to determine whether or not grades improve as a result of being in mentoring programs (Jekielek et al., 2002).

Regarding health and safety, mentoring programs tend to aim for outcomes related to substance abuse and delinquent behavior. First, programs seem to show

promise in preventing substance abuse. Youth in Big Brothers/Big Sister were 46% less likely to use drugs, and minority youth were 70% less likely to use drugs than other minorities not in the program. Second, some negative behaviors seem to be reduced by mentoring relationships but not all. Behaviors unaffected by the mentoring seem to be stealing, office visits, fighting, cheating, and tobacco use (Jekielek et al., 2002).

Regarding social and emotional development, mentoring program participation encourages positivie social attitudes and relationships. Students in the Across Ages program "had significantly more positive attitudes toward school, the future, the elderly, and helping behaviors" (Jekielek et al., 2002, p. 4). Participants also communicated better with their friends and family. The review, however, was inconclusive regarding whether or not mentoring programs improve students' self-worth. There may be an indirect link, between mentoring programs and self-worth. It was found that mentoring may improve overall self-worth because it improved parental relationships and confidence in school (Jekielek at al., 2002).

All mentoring programs are not effective. Effective mentoring relationships have specific characteristics. First, the longer the mentoring relationship, the better the outcome. Second, it is best for mentors to keep in contact with the students and know their families. Third, it is beneficial for students to perceive a strong relationship with their mentor. Finally, at-risk youth seem to benefit the most from mentoring (Jekielek et al., 2002).

Enhancement of mentoring programs is also provided by specific program practices. The programs need both structure and planning, including supervision and training. Successful programs also are based on the needs of students, not the plans of

the adults. This philosophy is shared by the Search Institute, saying that adults should not use the "prescriptive" approach by basing the relationship on their own goals. Instead, they should involve the student in the relationship and the activities taken part in (Jekielek et al., 2002).

There are still unanswered questions in the field of mentoring. The following questions are still being addressed in research: 1) How does group mentoring compare to one-on-one?; 2) Are there certain types of activities that are more beneficial?; 3) When implemented for different age groups, how do effective mentoring programs look different?; 4) What are good recruitment practices?; 5) How much money and how many staff members are needed to recruit, train, and support mentors (Jekielek et al., 2002)?

Support for the Empowerment Assets

Researchers agree that youth feeling as if they have a role in their community is vital to their development. However, they have recently discovered that there is a need for a greater understanding of how the community can foster empowerment and thus positive development in youth (Cargo, Grams, Ottoson, Ward, & Green, 2003).

One particular study emerged as the Healthy Communities Process was implemented in order to "encourage adults to create physical and social environments to promote health and quality of life" (Cargo et al., 2003, p. 67). The assessment used found that youth were not adequately involved in "addressing their quality of life (QOL) issues" (Cargo et al., 2003, p. 67). After data was collected and interviews conducted, empowerment was found to be a transactional process. See **Table 4** for this process.

It was the adults' jobs to create an empowering environment, setting up the social environment in order for students to take responsibility for their QOL issues. This took

place in two ways. First, adults needed to create a welcoming social climate by providing opportunities, believing in youth, respecting, encouraging, and caring. Second, since students didn't have skills to take responsibility for their QOL issues, adults had to enable them by facilitating, teaching, mentoring, and providing feedback (Cargo et al., 2003).

Youth becoming empowered was defined as "the healthful adaptation of youth to confronting challenges associated with directing a youth-defined agenda" (Cargo et al., 2003, p. 73). It was vital that youth were engaged and stay involved in the process. Youth had different motivations for being a part of the project. Some were curious and some had a need to belong. The youth stayed involved because they felt the project was meaningful to them, had a responsibility, and made friends (Cargo et al., 2003).

Controlling the process allowed students to face challenges that pushed their individual and collective skills. Their potential was realized through developing esteem, gaining confidence, building competencies, and raising consciousness. Through this empowerment, students also then cultivated more change longitudinally because their development was enhanced, and they became more integrated into the community (Cargo et al., 2003).

In sum, when empowering youth, it needs to be a partnering approach instead of a "top-down" approach. Cargo et al. (2003) found the following:

> "When you're trying to empower someone, you can't empower them unless you give them the opportunity to do it themselves. They have to be able to experience whatever that is, so that they can have the feeling of what's happening. Otherwise, it's like saying, I'm going to learn how to swim, but you're on land. You have to be in the water to learn how to swim" (p. 7)

Youth Organizations: Child Trends

"Child Trends is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization dedicated to improving the lives of children by conducting research and providing science-based information to improve the decisions, programs, and policies that affect children and their families. In advancing its mission, Child Trends collects and analyzes data; conducts, synthesizes, and disseminates research; designs and evaluates programs; and develops and tests promising approaches to research in the field". This is the mission statement of Child Trends, founded in 1979. Sound familiar? Knowing that there are other research groups that have the same goal as Search Institute speaks wonders about the need for a national youth policy.

Recently Child Trends compiled a review of more than 300 studies on educational adjustment, educational achievement, and educational attainment in order to understand what factors contribute to youth's academic success (Redd, Brooks, & McGarvey, 2002). They identify the family, peers, school, and community as important influences on adolescents' lives as well as the adolescents themselves. They also provide implications for those involved with youth that are quite similar to those of the Search Institute.

Adolescents' success in the past contributes to motivation to aspire to greatness as a teen. Past achievement is the strongest predictor of success and attainment in school. Race and ethnicity seem to have less impact on success as do socioeconomic background and other factors due to the finding that, when taking into account background differences, black and Hispanic teens attain and achieve more than their white counterparts (as cited in Redd et al., 2002). What adolescents do in their free time seems to also affect their achievement.

In regards to familial influence, parental involvement was found to be a strong predictor of success in school, this being aligned with the Search Institute's findings. Higher socioeconomic status contributes to students aspiring to more. Students living with both biological parents "tend to be more engaged in school, have higher educational aspirations and expectations, do better in school, and are more likely to graduate from high school and continue their education than teens in single-parent or step-parent families" (as cited in Redd et al., 2002, p. 2). Also, parenting style affects achievement. Teens whose parents provide rules and consequences, equated with Search Institute's boundaries and expectations assets, tend to be more successful in school.

Peers also seem to be a strong influence on academic achievement and attainment, but more studies are needed in this area. What has been found is that there is a tendency for students to mirror the attitudes of their peers in regards to school. Also, students who spend less time with friends tend to achieve more, as well as teens who choose to hang out with students whose aspirations are high (as cited in Redd et al., 2002). Again, this is an area in need of further study.

The school context is also a strong predictor of educational success. Students' perceptions that they hold regarding the attitude of teachers toward them is important, which goes along with the Search Institutes idea that youth need to feel valued. Interestingly, it has been found that schools that emphasize such things as task mastery rather than test mastery lend more to student achievement, with students being more motivated and engaged (as cited in Redd et al., 2002). This may have great implications for the current trend of high stakes testing.

Child Trends has formulated a list of implications for those working with youth that seem to mirror many of the assets (as cited in Redd et al., 2002).

- **Develop relationships with students** for support, to express how they are valued, and to increase motivation in school. (Asset # 3, 5, 7, 14, 16, 21, 22, 37, 40)
- **Encourage teens to take academic-track courses.**
- **Encourage teens to participate in extracurricular activities.** Students' choices about how they spend time outside of school are related to school achievement. Extracurricular activities are connected with positive development and better achievement. (Constructive Use of Time Assets)
- **Discourage teens from working outside of school too much, preferably less than twenty hours.**
- **Aim to keep teens from risky behavior and activities.**
- **Give opportunities for positive peer interaction.** (Asset # 15, 36)
- **Help parents to pursue education and training programs for greater financial stability.**
- **Be educated as to how to help strengthen marriages and/or find supportive services for single parent families.** (Asset # 1, 2, 6, 11)
- **Involve parents in their children's lives.** (Asset # 1, 2, 6, 11)

America's Promise: The Alliance for Youth and the *Helping America's Youth Initiative*

The following is a message to the nation given in 1997 by General Colin L. Powell, the founding chairman, at the founding of *America's Promise*. *America's*

Promise was founded after the Presidents' Summit for America's Future, held on April 27-29, 1997, in Philadelphia, where past presidents challenged the nation to make youth a national priority (Powell, 1997):

> "Most Americans believe that "getting kids off to the right start" should be our number one national priority. Yet, despite our best intentions, one of the great ironies of America today is the extent to which our youth are not getting the nurture they need to grow up into successful adults.
>
> Dramatic social changes have occurred in our society over the past several decades. Among these are the greater incidence of divorce, the demands placed upon working parents, and the gradual undermining of extended families and traditional community support systems. These changes have given rise to an America in which even young people from comfortable homes may lack the resources they need to grow up healthy, confident, and successful.
>
> None of our youth, however fortunate, is entirely safe from such menaces as drugs, violence, academic failure, irresponsible sex or other social pathologies of our time. All young people are experiencing difficulties in growing up these days, and young people from disadvantaged circumstances often have it the hardest.
>
> Reclaiming the next generation of Americans is a national challenge that requires a national response. That response is America's Promise – The Alliance for Youth.
>
> America's Promise calls on all Americans to scale up their investment in our youth; to challenge young people by having high expectations of them; and to

engage youth with opportunities to realize those expectations through constructive, character-building activities.

We cannot provide all our young people with idyllic childhoods, as much as we would like to do so. But we can — and we must — provide them with the minimum requirements they need to grow up into self-supporting and contributing adult members of society. We do this by keeping Five basic promises. We promise every youngster who needs our help:

1. Ongoing relationships with caring adults — parents, mentors, tutors or coaches — in his or her life;
2. Safe places with structured activities to learn and grow during non-school hours;
3. A healthy start and future;
4. Marketable skills through effective education; and
5. Opportunities to give back through community service.

Our role is not to compete with or to supplant the many fine organizations that have been helping American youth for generations. Rather, it is to serve as a "force multiplier" for youth support agencies by enlisting additional contributions of time, talent, and treasure. Because our Five basic Promises are coherent and mutually reinforcing, a commitment to keep one or more of them enhances the total impact of the commitment and bolsters all existing efforts to help youth.

America's Promise is a crusade. Throughout the length and breadth of this great land, we are working together to put youth first by keeping the Five basic Promises. We are in this crusade for the duration, and we will prevail."

The connections with the goals of Colin Powell and the Search Institute are obvious. In fact, Peter Benson, the President of the Search Institute, is one of the board members in *America's Promise*. It is clear that leaders of our nation see the need for a national youth policy. In an address to the nation in July 2001 President Bush said:

> "There is no more important goal for America than to make sure every person realizes the promise of our great land. And I want to thank the good folks of *America's Promise* for working tirelessly to make sure that goal reaches throughout all our country. My administration stands side by side with you...We know what children need to succeed. They need mentors and role models like Aisha. They need to be healthy and educated and challenged to serve -- and challenged to love a neighbor just like they'd like to be loved themselves. And that's what *America's Promise* does" (Bush, 2001).

This was in the year 2001, so many may ask, "What is being done now? Does our government still see youth as a priority?" The answer is a resounding yes! On March 7, 2005 at the Community College of Allegheny County in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, President Bush and his wife introduced a new initiative called *Helping America's Youth* that will tap into three key areas in a child's life: family, school, and community. It highlights the importance of a caring adult in children's lives, and is an "umbrella initiative" that incorporates federal programs already in existence. There will be a summit at the White House in the fall on this initiative. The best way to help children avoid risky behaviors and build successful lives will be discussed by researchers, policy experts, educators, parents, and community leaders. Researchers will help identify

causes of issues and effective ways to overcome them, community leaders will tell what works, and a new assessment tool will hopefully be introduced that helps communities to identify challenges and effective/ineffective plans that are in place. The hope is that communities can then build off government programs and volunteer programs to create a community that better serves youth (Bush, 2005).

Those wanting to better serve youth, particularly teachers, clearly have the support of the national government. So what can teachers do to better serve youth based on the research of the Search Institute, other organizations, and national initiatives?

Implications for Teachers

A Shift In Thinking

Being in an age of accountability, teachers are currently faced with an immense amount of pressure to produce students that can perform academically. Sadly, instead of focusing on the whole child, one with emotional and social needs, teachers have been forced to merely develop academic skills. However, society is changing, and they have to come to grips with the fact that their students are coming in with a wide range of "baggage" that needs to be dealt with. Starkman (2001) puts the role of teachers and others who work with youth nicely by comparing working with youth to preparing a meal:

> "You assemble nutritious ingredients; you combine them in certain ways to bring out the most flavorful attributes; and you patiently wait until the appropriate chemical and physical reactions take place and provide you with what you knew was worth all the work, namely, a wonderful, healthy, delicious meal" (p. 1).

Teachers seem to be missing the mark by trying to provide just certain "ingredients," leaving with a meal that doesn't taste as good and isn't as healthy.

There is more to school than just academics! Schools are in a unique position to make a difference in students' lives for a variety of reasons: 1) Students spend most of their time at school; 2) School contains organized activities, is where relationships can grow, and is where students are socialized; 3) Students are surrounded by adults who have purposefully picked a career so that they can help young people succeed; 4) Students are supposed to learn, be safe and healthy, and are supposed to become good citizens at school, all characteristics that are a part of the developmental assets (Starkman, 2001, p. 3). **Table 5** shows the percentage of youth that experience the assets that schools most directly affect. There is a clear need for improvement.

There needs to be a shift in teachers' minds: from focusing on academic outcomes to more long-term outcomes. This may prove overwhelming and give teachers the feeling that they are solely responsible for the well-being of their students, especially with the current pressure on teachers to prove academic achievement in their students. Many probably don't even want to think about other problems students may have.

However, there is encouragement for teachers:

> "At a time when demands for higher scores on standardized achievement tests pressure schools to focus narrowly on "the basics," it's affirming to have a research-based conceptual framework that clarifies how the pieces—strong relationships, challenge and expectation, music and the arts, social skills, character and values, and academic achievement—all fit together" (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 1999, p. 5).

First, it has been proven by the Search Institute that asset-building promotes academic achievement. "Children who feel better about school do better in school" (Starkman et al., 1999, p. 2). Teachers should think about their own work environments when considering how assets can help shape students' academic achievement. For example: Have they accomplished more when they feel good about coming to work? Are they encouraged to do more when they feel their coworkers respect them and their ideas? Do they feel more capable of success when others are them support them? Ensuring the success of students in school and building assets are not to be separate Starkman et al., 1999). There is a lot of emphasis currently on qualities of effective schools. **Table 6** shows qualities of effective schools, and **Table 7** shows how the assets correlate with them.

Second, the beauty of the assets is to empower those in youth lives to work *together*, namely the families, schools, and communities that serve youth, creating a "new energy" (Engleman, 2003, xii). Asset-building brings people together, not just principals and teachers, to make an impact on students' lives (Engleman, 2003). Third, asset-building is more a way of thinking than a program to execute. It is a "set of attitudes that encourage us to see what is right with children and adolescents" (Engleman, 2003, p. xi). Assets can be infused into programs and curriculum already in place. In sum, asset-building is both powerful and possible. **Tables 8** and **9** give further insight into the power of attitudes.

There is definite room for asset-building in today's schools. Not only that, but asset-building has relevance with current educational issues such as accountability, the importance of real life connections, and character education. **Table 10** shows a summary

of the relationships between asset-building and current issues in education (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2002, p. 19). However, when looking at the assets and also how they connect to current issues in education there is a danger that school personnel may think, "Oh, we're already doing that." It is true that many schools are already building assets. In fact, it shows that the asset framework is logical and relevant if they are already present in the schools. The problem is not that asset-building is absent but that it is not intentional and systematic. The results of students' experiences of the assets are proof that the belief and the action of school personnel are not matching (Starkman et al., 1999).

How to Get Started

It has been made clear that there is a striking difference between recognizing the importance of assets and deliberately building them. There is a suggested process to begin intentionally building assets in schools (Starkman et al., 1999, p. 76):

- Generate awareness of the asset framework.
- Conduct assessments of your students' asset levels and of the resources you have to build assets.
- Form relationships to build assets.
- Create an environment that fosters asset building.
- Use programs and practices to build assets.
- Sustain asset building.

The key seems to be to start out small and work your way up. First, everything begins with a shift in thinking. Asset-building is all about being proactive, focusing on students' strengths, working together, and being intentional rather than incidental.

Without changing attitudes toward youth, no outward change will be effective. Second, **Table 11** shows "little big things" teachers can start doing right away before current asset-building is even assessed. Again, it is about being intentional. For example, teachers should monitor their conversations in the teacher's lounge for whether or not it is affirming to students. That doesn't seem too hard, does it?

Once asset-building thinking is established, an evaluation of what is already in place is a great tool to move to the next step. This gives staff the insight as to what is strong already and what needs more work. Just as we are to build off of students' strengths, we should also build of our own strengths in schools. **Tables 12** and **13** show simple assessments that can be used.

The next several steps seem basic, but they are vital in asset-building. Relationships are the foundation! It makes a world of difference in students' lives if they feel as if adults care about them, think they can succeed, and consider them valuable human beings. The core of asset-building is relationships. In other words, "the young person has someone to learn from, to lean on, and to strive for" (Starkman, 2001).

The school environment includes both the building AND the people. School staff should evaluate what kind of environment THEY would like to work in. What do the children see when the walk in? Is this building in good shape? Are the hallways colorful and unique? The environment should say, "Come on in!" not, "We don't care!" (Starkman, 2001). Teachers need to also consider how they treat their students. Are students greeted with a smile? Are they referred to be name? Do teachers care about just their kids or all kids?

Once the awareness is generated and relationships and the environment are established, programs and practices that help students to thrive should be implemented. Some programs just need to be restructured to focus more on assets while others need to be created from scratch. Programs and practices can be implemented in the classroom, the school, and even the community. Also, they can vary in complexity, from such things as developing youth councils to rewarding students for acts of kindness (Starkman, 2001).

There are five key areas of programs and practices that teachers have the most control of and where asset building takes place: curriculum and instruction, organization (of the building and school day), extra-curricular activities, community partnerships, and support services (Taccogna, 2003). **Table 14** on shows strategies to be used in order to build assets most affected by the school (Starkman, Roberts, & Scales 2000). Again, it may seem overwhelming, but a closer look at these strategies shows once again how closely correlated asset-building strategies are with strategies that produce effective schools. Effective schools are clear and consistent with their expectations, provide extra tutoring, teach social skills, tap into their community, have high expectations of their students, involve parents, and establish school as a community. These are just a few of the many characteristics of schools that asset-building promotes as well (Starkman et al., 2000). It's all a matter of being more committed and intentional about giving students what they need but also not being afraid to make some changes!

Sustaining asset-building will be a challenge, as most teachers know the term "burn out." However, "just as it takes continual heat to keep water boiling, it takes continual effort to keep students' asset levels where we want to see them" (Starkman et

al., 1999, p. 159). "Any snapshot of a school is quickly outdated" (Starkman et al., 1999, p. 159) because the needs of the school change with new staff and new students. The following steps are suggested to sustain asset-building (Starkman et al., 1999, 160):

- Continually evaluate what you're doing and make appropriate adjustments.
- Continually inform, train, and guide people—including yourself—in the work of building assets.
- Continually work at changing the norms by incorporating the asset philosophy into everything you do.

It is key to remember the attitudes central to asset-building and remembering that it is not intended to be extra work. Teachers just need to "live the assets" (Starkman et al., 160).

Final Thoughts

"Once they became acquainted with the asset framework, they felt empowered by the language, validated by the research, and relieved by the realization that they were not alone" (Starkman et al., 1999, p. 160). This has been the goal of this thesis. We are in a great age of change. Our youth face challenges today unlike any period of time before, and many are concerned with how we can all make a difference in their lives and ensure they are getting what they need to succeed. However, there is a gap between what adults believe and what they are doing. This may be because they have a false perception of youth or because they feel helpless.

That is why the asset framework and a national youth policy are so important. The asset framework creates a common language. It pulls together the multiple

influences of youth in a way that is easy to understand and empowers adults to do more. It has been supported by research by the Search Institute, other researchers in the field of youth development, and even the national government. Our national government is making great strides in creating a national youth policy. Teachers, especially, have the power to make a change in students' lives. So, what are we waiting for?

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Appendix

Table 1

Action	Percentage of Adults Rating This "Most Important"	Percentage of Youth Rating This "Most Important"
Encourage school success. Encourage children and adolescents to take school seriously and do well in school.	79	59
Teach shared values. Teach children and adolescents the same core values as other adults do, such as honesty, equality, and responsibility.	73	50
Teach respect for cultural differences. Teach children and youth to respect the values and beliefs of different races and cultures, even when those values and beliefs conflict with their own.	68	63
Report positive behavior. Tell parent(s) if they see a child or adolescent doing something right.	62	43
Guide decision making. Help children and youth think through the possible good and bad consequences of their decisions.	60	40
Report misbehavior. Tell parent(s) if they see the child or adolescent doing something wrong.	55	46
Ensure well-being of neighborhood children and youth. Feel responsible to help ensure the well-being of the children and youth in the neighborhood.	53	38
Model giving and serving to help the needy. Volunteer time or donate money to show children and youth the importance of helping others.	52	N/A*
Know names. Know the names of many children and adolescents in the neighborhood.	52	32
Pass down traditions. Actively teach children and youth to preserve, protect, and pass down the traditions and values of their ethnic and/or religious cultures.	49	32
Give financial guidance. Offer children and youth guidance on responsibly saving, sharing, and spending money.	46	29
Have meaningful conversations. Have conversations with children and youth that help adults and children and youth "really get to know one another."	46	35
Play sports/do art with kids. Help children and youth spend their leisure time in supervised, constructive activities.	46	31
Seek opinions. Seek young people's opinions when making decisions that affect them.	46	48
Model giving and serving to make life fair and equal. Volunteer time or donate money to show young people the importance of working for social justice.	41	N/A
Discuss personal values. Openly discuss their own values with children and youth.	38	21
Discuss religious beliefs. Openly discuss their own religious or spiritual beliefs with children and youth.	33	22
Provide service opportunities. Give youth opportunities to make their communities better places, such as by feeding the homeless or cleaning up a park.	N/A	41

Table 2

Action	Percentage of Adults Who Say They and the Adults They Know Engage in This Way*	Percentage of Youth Who Say Most Adults They Know Do This
Encourage school success	68	79
Teach respect for cultural differences	57	67
Teach shared values	58	55
Ensure well-being of neighborhood kids	48	55
Know names	49	51
Report misbehavior	45	49
Guide decision making	41	46
Seek opinions	40	38
Report positive behavior	42	3
Give financial guidance	35	32
Pass down traditions	42	32
Have meaningful conversations	39	29
Provide service opportunities	NA	39
Play sports/do art with kids	35	28
Discuss religious beliefs	28	26
Discuss personal values	38	25
Model giving and serving to help needy	45	N/A
Model giving and serving to make life fair and equal	32	N/A

Table 3

Search INSTITUTE — Practical research benefiting children and youth

40 Developmental Assets™

Search Institute™ has identified the following building blocks of healthy development that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES HEALTHY YOUTH®

	Category	Asset Name and Definition
External Assets	Support	1. **Family Support**-Family life provides high levels of love and support. 2. **Positive Family Communication**-Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents. 3. **Other Adult Relationships**-Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults. 4. **Caring Neighborhood**-Young person experiences caring neighbors. 5. **Caring School Climate**-School provides a caring, encouraging environment. 6. **Parent Involvement in Schooling**-Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.
	Empowerment	7. **Community Values Youth**-Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth. 8. **Youth as Resources**-Young people are given useful roles in the community. 9. **Service to Others**-Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week. 10. **Safety**-Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.
	Boundaries & Expectations	11. **Family Boundaries**-Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts. 12. **School Boundaries**-School provides clear rules and consequences. 13. **Neighborhood Boundaries**-Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior. 14. **Adult Role Models**-Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior. 15. **Positive Peer Influence**-Young person's best friends model responsible behavior. 16. **High Expectations**-Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.
	Constructive Use of Time*	17. **Creative Activities**-Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts. 18. **Youth Programs**-Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community. 19. **Religious Community**-Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution. 20. **Time at Home**-Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.
Internal Assets	Commitment to Learning	21. **Achievement Motivation**-Young person is motivated to do well in school. 22. **School Engagement**-Young person is actively engaged in learning. 23. **Homework**-Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day. 24. **Bonding to School**-Young person cares about her or his school. 25. **Reading for Pleasure**-Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.
	Positive Values	26. **Caring**-Young person places high value on helping other people. 27. **Equality and Social Justice**-Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty. 28. **Integrity**-Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs. 29. **Honesty**-Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy." 30. **Responsibility**-Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility. 31. **Restraint**-Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.
	Social Competencies	32. **Planning and Decision Making**-Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices. 33. **Interpersonal Competence**-Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills. 34. **Cultural Competence**-Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds. 35. **Resistance Skills**-Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations. 36. **Peaceful Conflict Resolution**-Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.
	Positive Identity	37. **Personal Power**-Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me." 38. **Self-Esteem**-Young person reports having a high self-esteem. 39. **Sense of Purpose**-Young person reports that "my life has a purpose." 40. **Positive View of Personal Future**-Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

Table 4

Figure 1
Transactional Partnering Process Between Adults and Youth

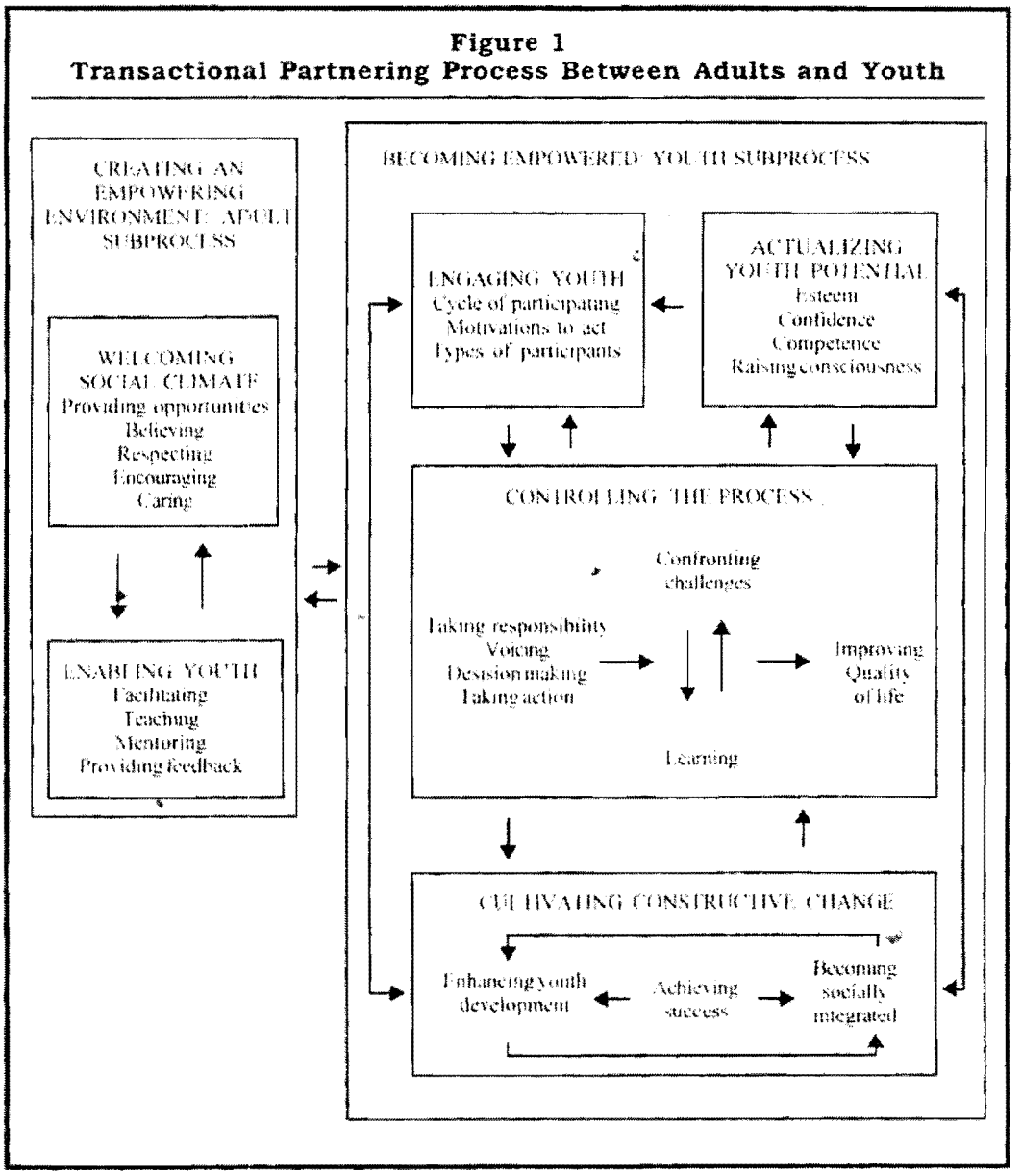

Table 5

Percentage of Youth Who Report Experiencing the Developmental Assets That Schools Can Most Directly Affect

Assets Schools Can Most Directly Affect	Percentage of Youth Experiencing Asset
School Engagement*	64%
Achievement Motivation*	63%
Positive Peer Influence*	60%
Youth Programs*	59%
Safety	55%
Bonding to School*	51%
Service to Others	50%
School Boundaries*	46%
Homework*	45%
Peaceful Conflict Resolution	44%
Interpersonal Competence*	43%
Other Adult Relationships*	41%
High Expectations*	41%
Resistance Skills	37%

Table 6

The Correlates of Effective Schooling

The individual and collective research of Ronald Edmonds, Larry Lezotte, and others identifies seven characteristics that effective schools have in common. These correlates represent the recommended ways to achieve high and equitable levels of student learning.[1] The research behind each of these correlates is well documented in a research synthesis produced by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Portland, Oregon.[2]

1. Safe and Orderly Environment

- Effective schools are relatively safer, cleaner, more orderly, and quieter.
- Adults care about the work of creating a safe and orderly environment.
- The environment conveys a sense of importance about the teaching/learning of essential skills.

2. High Expectations for Success

- A climate of expectation exists in which staff believes and demonstrates that *all* students can attain mastery of essential school skills.
- They do not expect that any significant number of children of any race or social class will fail.

3. Instructional Leadership

- The principals of effective schools are the instructional leaders in their buildings.
- Principals are much closer to the day-to-day instructional program, closely monitor pupil progress, and provide systematic feedback.

4. Clear School Mission

- There is a clearly articulated school mission through which the staff shares an understanding of a commitment to the instructional goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability.
- The staff accepts responsibility for students learning the essential skills.

5. Opportunity to Learn and Student Time on Task

- Teachers allocate a significant amount of classroom time to instruction in the essential skills.
- Students are engaged in whole class or large group learning activities that are planned and teacher directed.

6. Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress

- Progress is measured frequently.
- A variety of forms of assessment are used.
- The results of assessment are used to improve individual student performance.

7. Home-School Relations

- Parents understand and support the basic mission of the school.
- They are made to feel that they have an important role in achieving that mission.

Notes

1. Association for Effective Schools, Inc., *Correlates of Effective Schools.* Web site accessed September 25, 2002: www.mes.org/correlates.html. This 501(c)(3) nonprofit is located in Styvesant, NY.
2. Cotton, Kathleen. (1995). *Effective Schooling Practices: A Research Synthesis—1995 Update.* Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (NWREL). This synthesis update is based on the original 1984 *Effective Schooling Practices: A Research Synthesis,* written by Robert E. Blum and others at NWREL for use in their "Onward to Excellence" school change and improvement process implemented by more than 2,000 schools across the country.

Table 7

HANDOUT 2.5

The Correlates of Effective Schooling and the Developmental Assets

Effective schools research defines seven characteristics evident in schools that meet the standards of effectiveness.[1] This matrix illustrates that numerous assets in Search Institute's developmental asset framework connect to the seven correlates of effective schooling.

DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS	CORRELATES OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLING						
	Safe and Orderly Environment	High Expectations for Success	Instructional Leadership	Clear School Mission	Opportunity to Learn and Student Time on Task	Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress	Home-School Relations
5. Caring School Climate	■	■	■		■	■	
6. Parent Involvement		■					■
8. Youth as Resources	■			■	■		
10. Safety	■			■			
12. School Boundaries	■			■			■
14. Adult Role Models	■	■		■			■
15. Positive Peer Influence	■				■		
16. High Expectations		■	■		■	■	
17. Creative Activities				■			
18. Youth Programs				■			
21. Achievement Motivation		■	■	■	■	■	
22. School Engagement		■	■		■	■	■
23. Homework		■				■	
24. Bonding to School	■		■	■			
25. Reading for Pleasure			■	■			
32. Planning and Decision Making			■	■		■	
33. Interpersonal Competence	■	■	■			■	■
34. Cultural Competence	■	■	■			■	■

1. Association for Effective Schools, Inc., *Correlates of Effective Schools*. Web site accessed September 25, 2002: www.mes.org/correlates.html. This 501(c)(3) nonprofit is located in Styvesant, NY.

Table 8

Beliefs and Practices that Limit and Promote Asset Building

Beliefs and Practices that Limit Asset Building	Beliefs and Practices that Promote Asset Building
There's a program for everything, and the sources of success in working with students mostly come from formal programs.	We emphasize "informal" asset building based in the daily individual relationships students have with each other and with school adults.
"Interventions" for helping students are something we do to or for students.	We promote asset building with and not only for students, i.e., we encourage students' significant participation and leadership in building their own assets.
Once students attend a special intervention event or participate in a program, we've adequately helped them.	We commit to ensure that each student has repeated, ongoing opportunities for asset building, more than reliance solely on short-term special events or programs.
We believe that asset building is the job of only certain staff, such as teachers and counselors.	We believe that everyone in a school community is a potential asset builder—including students, custodians, bus drivers, paraprofessionals, nurses, teachers, administrators, and cafeteria workers.
We believe that asset building is for only certain students, such as "at-risk" students.	We commit to intentionally build assets throughout the entire school community, so that all students and school adults receive the benefits.
We believe that schools carry the burden of students' academic success.	We believe that accountability for students' performance should be a collective responsibility of the entire community, not just schools.

Table 9

THE ASSET-BUILDING DIFFERENCE

The asset-building difference helps us focus on positive thoughts and actions when we:

MOVE FROM . . .	TO . . .
Viewing students as problems	Seeing students as resources
Talking about problems	Talking about possibilities and positives
Reacting to problems	Actively building strengths
Treating students as objects of teaching	Respecting students as actors in their own development
Relying on professionals to help	Involving everyone in the lives of students
Managing crises	Building a shared vision
Focusing on troubled students	Focusing on all students
Blaming others	Claiming personal responsibility
Competing priorities	Cooperative efforts
Conflicting signals about values and priorities	Consistent messages about what is important

Table 10

The Relationship between Current Educational Issues and Building Developmental Assets

Current Educational Issue	Connection to Building Developmental Assets
Accountability and test scores (the pressure on schools to raise standardized achievement test scores)	◆ The more students experience the developmental assets, the more their grades improve. ◆ Research shows[1] that various assets, especially those we've identified as ones schools can most directly affect, are associated with higher achievement scores and with greater levels of other personal traits and environmental conditions that lead to higher performance, such as family support, high expectations, bonding to school, and greater effort.
Closing the achievement gap (between White, African American, Asian, Native American, and Hispanic students; and between poor and more affluent students)	◆ Search Institute's research shows that, in general, higher levels of assets seem to exert an even more powerful positive effect on vulnerable youth who are already at higher risk of lower achievement and other negative experiences.[2] ◆ The top assets predicting school success (Achievement Motivation, School Engagement, and Youth Programs) are the same across all racial/ethnic groups Search Institute has studied.[3] ◆ Other research[4,5] shows that when schools use practices such as interdisciplinary curricula, team teaching, advisor-advisee guidance, heterogeneous grouping rather than tracking, and other practices that help build youth's developmental assets, grades and achievement test scores among underachieving and higher-achieving youth become more similar—because underachievers do better, not because high-achievers do worse.
Connecting school with real world needs (preparing students for work)	◆ Among the most important employability skills are motivational attributes and interpersonal skills that enable employees to work hard and to understand and work with many types of people in different positions. ◆ Asset development encourages the use of experiential education approaches such as service-learning that widen young people's circle of relationships with other adults. ◆ There is evidence that such approaches, done well, are associated with greater caring about others' welfare, greater commitment to doing schoolwork, and other positive outcomes.[6,7] Building assets also promotes the school success and sustained adult contacts envisioned in various work readiness blueprints.

#19 / The Relationship between Current Educational Issues and Building Developmental Assets, continued

Site-based management (increasing teachers' voices in school decision making)	♦ Building developmental assets is everyone's responsibility, not just superintendents and members of boards of education, not only principals or teachers, but all school adults. ♦ The developmental assets framework reinforces the notion of those closest to students having strengthened hands in school decision making, but also works against "dumping" of responsibilities (e.g., teachers shouldn't suddenly add the role of guidance counselor to their jobs, but teachers, counselors, and all other school adults *should* more intentionally express care and support to students). ♦ A study of 11,000 students in more than 800 high schools found that in schools in which staff have a strong *collective* responsibility for student success, "students learn more, and learning is more equitably distributed."[8] ♦ According to the researchers, what makes the difference in these schools is a commitment to building strong, caring relationships among staff, among staff and students, and among school, family, and community—exactly the kind of relationships that are the foundation of the developmental assets framework.
"Back to basics" (cutbacks in arts, health, and "extra"-curricular activities)	♦ In the attempt to focus more on "core" curricula, too many schools have chosen to cut back in recent years on art, music, health, physical education, and "extra"-curricular programs. ♦ Search Institute's research shows that time spent in youth programs truly is *co*curricular, in that Youth Programs is one of the three assets that most strongly predict school success. ♦ Recent reports also show that students' participation in art and music—expressed by the Creative Activities asset—can also have positive effects on their school achievement.[9] ♦ Health education, too, is generally associated with a host of important outcomes and is specifically the discipline in which students gain the most experience with the assets in the social competencies category.[10] Building developmental assets reinforces all these curricular and cocurricular areas.

#19 / The Relationship between Current Educational Issues and Building Developmental Assets, continued

Schools' role in community partnerships (connections between schools and community)	◆ "Community" and "full-service" schools connect—in one location—education, health, social services, recreation, and other activities in support of the healthy development of children and youth, and they usually do so through arrangements that keep school buildings open and used for extended hours in the evenings and on weekends. ◆ In addition to student achievement, other positive outcomes include improved health, personal growth, social development, and community improvement.[11] ◆ This simultaneous attention to multiple parts of young people's worlds is paralleled and supported by the breadth of the developmental assets framework and its attention to family, school, peer, and community influences on children and youth, as well as its specific addressing of strategies such as youth programs and service-learning.
Safe and drug-free schools and communities, school violence (reducing students' involvement with violence and drugs)	◆ As assets go up, experiencing or committing violence goes down, as does problem use of alcohol and other drugs.[12] ◆ Students in schools that enforce clear values, rules, and expectations, and that are perceived by students as caring schools, experience less violence.[13,14] ◆ The assets explicitly include a focus on reinforcing students' values against drinking alcohol or having sexual intercourse while still a teenager, and developing effective, nonviolent conflict resolution skills. ◆ According to the Principles of Effectiveness adopted by the U.S. Department of Education,[15] school districts receiving or pursuing funding under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act may now also use data associating developmental assets with reduced risk behaviors to demonstrate that building developmental assets "shows promise" as an effort to reduce drug use and violence.
"Values education," "moral education," "character education" (schools and morality)	◆ Asset development names six values often emphasized in values education, moral education, or character education programs—Caring, Equality and Social Justice, Integrity, Honesty, Responsibility, and Restraint. ◆ More importantly, positive norms and values are implied throughout the 40-asset framework. For example, the Cultural Competence asset implies that youth *should* respect the experiences, values, and beliefs of people who are of a different race or culture from their own, the Caring School Climate asset implies that students *should* care about each other, and the High Expectations asset implies that teachers *should* push students to be the best they can be. Building the developmental assets is consistent with school promotion of such norms and values.

#19 / The Relationship between Current Educational Issues and Building Developmental Assets, continued

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Table 11

LITTLE BIG THINGS

Little Big Things to do for students every day:

- Greet students at the door.
- Speak to or call each student by name in your class each day.
- Notice things about students that show you care and are interested in them as people.
- Make positive statements as often as possible.
- Dispute only inaccurate facts and accept opinions even though they may differ from yours.
- Provide opportunities for students to have some control in the learning environment (such as selection of course content or ways of teaching/learning).
- Smile more.
- Give students responsibility and think of them as responsible and resourceful people.
- Be honest with students—their trust in you is tied to your trust in them.
- Express anger toward a misbehavior rather than toward a student or group of students.
- Stay in the present—learn to forgive and forget.
- Be authentic—be a real person to students.
- Encourage students to be problem solvers and then *accept and honor their solutions.*
- Go to a student event outside the classroom to show your interest and support.
- Become adept at cooperative learning as a teaching strategy—it gives *all* students purpose and opportunities to participate in meaningful ways.
- Use a student-led parent-teacher conference model. (See activity handout 34, "Student-Led Conferences.")
- Sponsor a student club or activity.
- Structure learning around mastery rather than grades.
- Make yourself available to students at a consistent time each day.
- Never use sarcasm with students—it can damage any relationship.
- Monitor your conversation in the teachers' lounge—does it affirm students?
- Pay attention to building your own assets and positive self-concept.

Contributed by Christine Beyer, Search Institute trainer and consultant for Vision Training Associates.

Table 12

Where Are We Now? Asset-Building Culture Shift Assessment for Schools

Think about your school today. Circle where you think your school is on the following dimensions. The closer you are to 5, the more your school is making the culture shifts in thinking and action that are characteristic of a deep commitment to asset building.

1. We focus on naming youth problems that should be fixed.	1	2	3	4	5	1. We focus on enhancing young people's positive development.
2. We focus most of our energy and resources either on troubled youth or on high-achieving youth.	1	2	3	4	5	2. We distribute our energy and resources to benefit all students.
3. We emphasize age- and grade-specific opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5	3. We promote frequent cross-age contacts, among students and between students and adults.
4. We each take care of our "own" students, not other teachers' or staff's students.	1	2	3	4	5	4. All staff understand and act on their responsibility to take care of all students.

Overhead 7a. (Handout 10.1 from N. Starkman, P.C. Scales, and C. Roberts, *Great Places to Learn: How Asset-Building Schools Help Students Succeed* (copyright © Search Institute, 1999). This overhead master may be copied for educational, noncommercial purposes only. www.search-institute.org.

Where Are We Now? Asset-Building Culture Shift Assessment for Schools, continued

5. We emphasize formal programs and curricula in our work with students.				5. We emphasize the informal supportive relationships we have with students.
1	2	3	4	5
6. Staff in different departments or positions have different visions for young people's healthy development.				6. All staff are committed to a common vision of young people's healthy development.
1	2	3	4	5
7. Students in this school are exposed to conflicting and inconsistent messages about what is important and valued.				7. Students in this school are exposed to consistent messages about what is important and valued.
1	2	3	4	5
8. We try to be efficient in this school and not offer too many programs that duplicate each other.				8. Students are provided with multiple opportunities to build the same developmental assets.
1	2	3	4	5

Table 13

29

Are We an Asset-Building School Community?

Read each statement and decide how important you think each statement is for your school (3=very important, 2=moderately important, 1=a little important). Then, decide how well you think your school does what the statement describes (3=we do it very well, 2=we do it moderately well, and 1=we don't do it well at all).

Next, look at the items that you labeled as being very important. How well are you doing on all of those? Items that are very important and that you're doing well on are successes. Celebrate them! And make sure you have an explicit plan to keep on being successful with those. Items that are very important, but that you're not doing well on might be appropriate to focus on in your asset-building agenda.

And remember—you're describing your school, not just your "own" students or classes. If you don't know how to describe your school on an item, ask the relevant people for their input.

	How Important Is This? 3=very important 2=moderately important 1=a little important	**How Well Do We Do This?** 3=we do it very well 2=we do it moderately well 1=we don't do it well at all
Relationships		
1. The great majority of adults on the school staff are interested in their students as persons.	_____	_____
2. There is a feeling of collegiality among administrators, faculty, and other staff.	_____	_____
3. Parents are genuine partners in children's learning and schooling.	_____	_____
4. We effectively promote caring relationships among students, teachers, and other school staff.	_____	_____
5. Each student is known by name and talked with several times a week by at least several adults on staff.	_____	_____
6. The main decision-making style is for teachers, administrators, other school staff, and students to share in decision making.	_____	_____
7. We foster close teacher-student relationships by doing things like breaking the school into small "houses" or teams and using advisor-advisee or teacher-based guidance programs.	_____	_____
8. Counselors explicitly talk about future plans, short- and long-term, with every student several times a year.	_____	_____

#29 / Are We an Asset-Building School Community?, continued

	How Important Is This? 3=very important 2=moderately important 1=a little important	How Well Do We Do This? 3=we do it very well 2=we do it moderately well 1=we don't do it well at all
Environment		
9. Students feel valued and cared for.	_____	_____
10. Students feel they belong in and are connected to the school.	_____	_____
11. All students get encouragement and care.	_____	_____
12. All staff get encouragement and care.	_____	_____
13. Adults and students consistently express high expectations for student performance and behavior.	_____	_____
14. Adults consistently express high expectations for each other's performance and behavior.	_____	_____
15. The great majority of students consistently put forth great effort in their schoolwork.	_____	_____
16. We effectively maintain student motivation and engagement.	_____	_____
17. We effectively strengthen the social expectations among teachers and students that promote achievement.	_____	_____
18. It is common to see and hear laughter, interest, smiles, and other indications of pleasure and joy in the majority of students.	_____	_____
19. All staff, not only teachers, feel student success is their personal responsibility.	_____	_____
20. School staff, parents, district personnel, and community members share a commitment to building assets among all students.	_____	_____
21. We ensure staff and student safety (freedom from harassment as well as violence) through consistent rule enforcement and positive role modeling.	_____	_____
22. In this school, students routinely contribute to the determination of rules and consequences.	_____	_____
23. We provide challenging curriculum to all students as an expression of our high expectations for them.	_____	_____

#29 / Are We an Asset-Building School Community?, continued

Programs and Practices	**How Important Is This?** 3=very important 2=moderately important 1=a little important	**How Well Do We Do This?** 3=we do it very well 2=we do it moderately well 1=we don't do it well at all
24. Commitment to asset building is a criterion used to select new school staff, including teachers and administrators.	_____	_____
25. The annual review of teachers includes assessment of their commitment to and engagement in asset building.	_____	_____
26. There are plentiful and systematic opportunities for students to learn key social and decision-making skills.	_____	_____
27. All students are asked to contribute to the betterment of the school community.	_____	_____
28. Average and underachieving students have as many chances to be leaders and contributors as do above-average students.	_____	_____
29. Students are treated as valuable resources and active players in building our school community.	_____	_____
30. There is very little "tracking" of students into courses grouped by ability levels.	_____	_____
31. Most instruction is offered through interdisciplinary teacher teams.	_____	_____
32. We don't have a rigid departmental organization.	_____	_____
33. The great majority of students have to synthesize and interpret more than they have to memorize.	_____	_____
34. Most students can connect what they're learning to the world beyond school, through things like service-learning and internships with community resources.	_____	_____
35. Cocurricular programs are usually run cooperatively with youth-serving organizations, congregations, and other community groups, not just by the school.	_____	_____
36. This school is a significant partner in a community-wide coalition or initiative on behalf of children and youth.	_____	_____

#29 / Are We an Asset-Building School Community?, continued

	How Important Is This? 3=very important 2=moderately important 1=a little important	**How Well Do We Do This?** 3=we do it very well 2=we do it moderately well 1=we don't do it well at all
37. We often use cooperative learning strategies to provide constructive group interaction.	_____	_____
38. We typically keep students in the same teams for several years to help nurture deeper relationships.	_____	_____
39. We train numerous children and youth—and not only the highest-achieving students—to be peer tutors and mediators.	_____	_____
40. All students are actively recruited for participation in school- or community-sponsored after-school programs.	_____	_____
41. We collaborate with a wide range of community resources to expand the types and operating hours of school- and community-sponsored youth programs.	_____	_____
42. All students participate in health and sexuality education that focuses on fostering personal and social health and wellness.	_____	_____
43. Our parent communications emphasize suggestions for supporting learning at home (e.g., talking about what goes on at school, expressing the value of education) even more than parents' attendance at school functions.	_____	_____
44. We often collect data on students' needs through strategies like surveys and focus groups.	_____	_____
45. We know and often celebrate what is currently being done to build assets.	_____	_____
46. We annually assess our current organization, structures, and strategies in light of asset building.	_____	_____

Table 14

Building the Assets Most Directly Connected to Academic Success

School Engagement

School Engagement: 64% of students report having the asset.

Area	Strategies
Curriculum and instruction	◆ Develop integrative and interdisciplinary curricula. ◆ Use team teaching with adequate common planning time. ◆ Initiate projects that involve more than "skill and drill." ◆ Implement exploratory programs that keep students interested. ◆ Use student-led activities and group learning.
Organization	◆ Arrange large schools into small "houses" or teams so that more intimate learning communities can foster interpersonal connections. ◆ Use advisor-advisee or teacher-based guidance programs to foster close teacher-student relationships.
Cocurricular programs	◆ Offer a variety of clubs and after-school activities based on inclusion more than interscholastic competition.
Community partnerships	◆ Engage businesses and other community organizations to provide internships and experiential education that connects students to the "real" world. ◆ Invite community people into school as resources.
Support services	◆ Have extensive articulation programs to ease building transitions from elementary to middle school and middle school to high school. ◆ Maintain a low student-to-counselor ratio.

Achievement Motivation

Achievement Motivation: 63% of students report having the asset.

Area	Strategies
Curriculum and instruction	◆ Provide ungraded units and courses to stimulate learning for its own sake. ◆ Use heterogeneous grouping whenever possible and minimize tracking. ◆ Add "authentic" assessment, e.g., student portfolios. ◆ Evaluate students' personal progress, not only their standing relative to their peers.
Organization	◆ Use flexible scheduling that allows greater depth of content and more opportunity for teacher aid to individual students.
Cocurricular programs	◆ Provide tutoring alternatives. ◆ Offer after-school homework programs.
Community partnerships	◆ Offer experiential education, including service learning.
Support services	◆ Offer ways of engaging students as leaders in the community (such as youth members of school boards or community planning boards).

Positive Peer Influence

Positive Peer Influence: 60% of students report having the asset.

Area	Strategies
Curriculum and instruction	◆ Use cooperative learning strategies to provide constructive group interaction.
Organization	◆ Keep students in the same teams for several years to enable deeper relationships.
Cocurricular programs	◆ Provide rotating leadership opportunities in clubs and activities to enable leadership by more than the usual student leaders.
Community partnerships	◆ Involve students with community organizations as leaders and trainers in skill-building activities with other children.
Support services	◆ Train numerous children and youth—not only the highest-achieving students—to be peer tutors and educators in areas of their interest.

Youth Programs

Youth Programs: 59% of students report having the asset.

Area	Strategies
Curriculum and instruction	◆ Ensure that all students are actively recruited for participation in school-sponsored after-school programs.
Organization	◆ Keep the school building open for activities more hours in evenings and on weekends.
Cocurricular programs	◆ Ensure that all students are actively recruited for participation in school-sponsored after-school programs.
Community partnerships	◆ Collaborate with a wide range of community resources to expand the variety and the duration of school- and nonschool-sponsored youth programs.
Support services	◆ Assess each student's talents and interests in order to make appropriate recommendations of constructive after-school activity programs.

School Boundaries

School Boundaries: 46% of students report having the asset.

Area	Strategies
Curriculum and instruction	◆ Provide clear guidance on standards for performance that earn different grades, along with plentiful assistance in meeting those standards, and give students the grade they earn.
Organization	◆ Develop, with widespread student input, and regularly communicate clear school rules and sanctions. ◆ Enforce violations with consistency, fairness, and certainty.
Cocurricular programs	◆ Enforce the same expectations for behavior as are the norm during the school day.
Community partnerships	◆ Expose all students to community resources and business through experiential education, and encourage those resources to teach students about the rules and consequences of their operation.
Support services	◆ Maintain a peer mediation program as a visible part of a program to enforce school rules.

Bonding to School

Bonding to School: 51% of students report having the asset.

Area	Strategies
Curriculum and instruction	◆ Provide extensive health and sexuality education that focuses on fostering personal and social health and wellness. ◆ Use service learning and other types of experiential education that give students opportunities to feel valuable and make contributions.
Organization	◆ Use advisor-advisee or teacher-based guidance programs to foster close teacher-student relationships. ◆ Ensure staff and student safety (freedom from harassment as well as violence) through consistent rule enforcement. ◆ Provide encouragement and opportunities for school staff to model healthful habits of exercise, nutrition, and conflict resolution. ◆ Ensure widespread student input to school rules and sanctions. ◆ Keep the same students and teachers together for several years ("looping") to maximize the strength of relationships.
Cocurricular programs	◆ Offer a variety of clubs and after-school activities based on inclusion more than interscholastic competition.
Community partnerships	◆ Provide extensive health and sexuality education that focuses on fostering personal and social health and wellness. ◆ Use service learning and other types of experiential education that give students opportunities to feel valuable and make contributions.
Support services	◆ Maintain a peer mediation program with student participation from all achievement levels. ◆ Teach students and staff how to express their caring for each other. ◆ Provide school health services. ◆ Have extensive articulation programs to ease building transitions from elementary school to middle/junior high school and from middle/junior high school to high school.

Homework

Homework: 45% of students report having the asset.

Area	Strategies
Curriculum and instruction	◆ Use teacher teams so the amount and type of homework can be better coordinated.
Organization	◆ Provide times within and outside the school day for tutorial assistance from peers or adults.
Cocurricular programs	◆ Provide after-school homework programs, such as student or parent volunteer mentoring/tutoring.
Community partnerships	◆ Ensure that parents understand expectations of students for doing homework. ◆ Provide an ongoing centralized system for responding to questions from parents and addressing their ideas about homework.
Support services	◆ Provide regular mini-courses on learning skills—for students and for parents—emphasizing hands-on technology for students and parent involvement strategies for parents.

Other Adult Relationships

Other Adult Relationships: 41% of students report having the asset.

Area	Strategies
Curriculum and instruction	◆ Use team teaching to maximize the extent to which teachers can get to know individual students.
Organization	◆ Use teacher teams and interdisciplinary "care teams" of school adults to deepen personal relationships with students.
Cocurricular programs	◆ Train adult after-school program leaders in mentoring.
Community partnerships	◆ Recruit numerous community adult volunteers. ◆ Provide specific support and training for volunteers in the instructional strategies being used in classrooms. ◆ Invite neighborhood residents to school functions.
Support services	◆ Use advisor-advisee or teacher-based guidance programs to foster close teacher-student relationships.

Interpersonal Competence

Interpersonal Competence: 43% of students report having the asset.

Area	Strategies
Curriculum and instruction	◆ Include communication, decision-making and planning skills, and other emotional intelligence skills (e.g., self-control, stress management, nonviolent conflict resolution) as formal content throughout the curriculum. ◆ Emphasize cross-cultural understanding by an emphasis on studying the contributions of experts from a wide range of cultures.
Organization	◆ Keep the same students and teachers together for several years ("looping") to maximize the strength of relationships.
Cocurricular programs	◆ Provide after-school programs that focus on emotional intelligence skills, especially opportunities for young people to help others.
Community partnerships	◆ Provide after-school programs that focus on emotional intelligence skills, especially opportunities for young people to help others.
Support services	◆ Assess individual students' various interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence as regularly as you assess their cognitive progress or occupational interests.

High Expectations

High Expectations: 41% of students report having the asset.

Area	Strategies
Curriculum and instruction	◆ Provide challenging curricula to all students as an expression of high expectations.
Organization	◆ Minimize grouping of students by ability (tracking). ◆ Use various forms of flexible grouping strategies to support student progress toward expectations.
Cocurricular programs	◆ Encourage young people to set, and help them meet, "personal best" goals in sports, clubs, or other organized activities.
Community partnerships	◆ Recruit sufficient mentors (one for every few students) so that every student has an opportunity to benefit from a mentor from the community.
Support services	◆ Have counselors explicitly talk about students' short- and long-term plans with every student several times a year.

Caring School Climate

Caring School Climate: 24% of students report having the asset.

Area	Strategies
Curriculum and instruction	◆ Offer challenging curricula with lots of exploratory opportunities. ◆ Integrate service-learning throughout the curriculum.
Organization	◆ Arrange large schools into small "houses" or teams so that more intimate learning communities can foster interpersonal connections. ◆ Establish teacher teams. ◆ Provide opportunities for physical activity throughout each day.
Cocurricular programs	◆ Emphasize participation more than competition.
Community partnerships	◆ Invite community resources to teach interpersonal skills.
Support services	◆ Ensure that staff know and greet all students by their first names. ◆ Give all students opportunities to be problem solvers and contributors to the school community, such as through peer-mediation teams, other kinds of peer helping programs, or expanded student governance programs.

Parent Involvement in Schooling

Parent Involvement in Schooling: 29% of students report having the asset.

Area	Strategies
Curriculum and instruction	◆ Make curriculum content, student standards, and descriptions of grade level or course content available to parents. ◆ Assign homework involving parents. ◆ Provide ongoing, hands-on experiences with both content and process for parents to better understand classroom work.
Organization	◆ Give parents opportunities to volunteer. ◆ Recruit parents for committees and task forces.
Cocurricular programs	◆ Recruit parents as advisors and adult mentors for after-school programs.
Community partnerships	◆ In communications to parents, provide suggestions for supporting learning at home (e.g., talking about what goes on at school, expressing the value of education, reading some of what students read). ◆ Encourage employers to permit periodic workday involvement at school without employees having to take time off.
Support services	◆ Provide on-site family resource centers. ◆ Have extensive articulation programs to ease building transitions from elementary school to middle/junior high school and from middle/junior high school to high school.

Reading for Pleasure

Reading for Pleasure: 24% of students report having the asset.

Area	Strategies
Curriculum and instruction	◆ Emphasize reading in all classes, as well as a sharing of favorite things to read related to various curriculum themes. ◆ Read aloud in the classroom. ◆ Have students demonstrate different levels of information about the same topic retrievable from reading off the Internet, and from reading newspapers, magazines, and books. ◆ Provide training in reading for teachers in all content areas, specifically on the role of reading for both meaning and pleasure.
Organization	◆ Consistently ask for suggestions from students and parents for materials to acquire for the school library.
Cocurricular programs	◆ Encourage parents to read and have plentiful material to read at home. ◆ Suggest that community resource people involved in after-school programs or other school collaborations share their favorite relevant readings with students.
Community partnerships	◆ Encourage parents to read and have plentiful material to read at home. ◆ Suggest that community resource people involved in after-school programs or other school collaborations share their favorite relevant readings with students.
Support services	◆ Designate a reading corner in guidance; provide comfortable chairs and current reading for all reading levels.